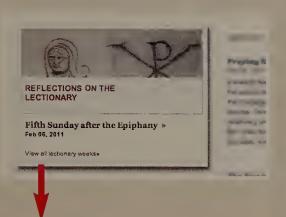
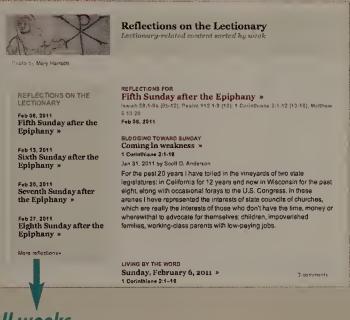


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Current week



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by John M. Buchanan

Courage to compromise

ON A STEAMY summer afternoon in the 1970s, Richard Lugar came to Hanover College in southern Indiana to speak at a synod meeting about politics as a sacred calling and about how his faith and church membership were an important part of his vocation. Lugar was first elected to the U.S. Senate in 1976 after two terms as mayor of Indianapolis. He had gained national recognition for Unigov, a consolidation of the Indianapolis and Marion County governments that is credited with stimulating Indianapolis's impressive economic growth.

As a young pastor in northern Indiana, I was deeply impressed, and reminded of John F. Kennedy's words about the importance and dignity of the political vocation. I was proud of Lugar, a Republican, and of Democratic senator Birch Bayh, both of whom had reputations as moderates who collaborated with senators from the other party.

One of Lugar's crowning achievements was collaborating with Sam Nunn, a Democrat, to reduce the use, production and stockpiling of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. Today the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program has deactivated more than 7,500 nuclear warheads. Lugar also cooperated with then-senator Joe Biden on complex Pakistani issues and traveled to Russia with then-senator Barack Obama.

I was sorry when Lugar lost his recent primary race to state treasurer Richard Mourdock. The race wasn't even close. Lugar's age was a factor, as were questions about his residency. But the major reason for his defeat was that the Tea Party and conservative Super PACs such as Freedom Works and Club for Growth poured cash into the Mourdock campaign for the express purpose of replacing Lugar's brand of moderate bipartisanship with more ideologically orthodox conservatism.

Lugar wrote a letter afterward, affirming his continuing loyalty to the Republican Party and his commitment to working for Mourdock's election. Then he offered some advice. Mourdock had attacked Lugar's brand of Republicanism, saying that "it's time for confrontation, not collaboration." Lugar wrote that Mourdock will have to revise his unrelenting parti-

sanship if he is to be an effective senator. The effort to cleanse the party of any who deviate from conservative orthodoxy will only magnify the seriousness of the issues facing the nation. "There is little likelihood that either party will be able to impose their favored budget solutions on the other without some degree of compromise."

Then Lugar revealed his deepest convictions: "Legislators should have an ideological grounding and strong beliefs. . . . But ideology cannot be a substitute for a determination to think for yourself, a willingness to study an issue objectively, and for the fortitude to sometimes disagree with your party or even your constituents."

Lugar symbolizes something great but fragile about the American system of government: it relies on partisanship tempered by wisdom, on a commitment to the good of the nation that is not wedded to ideology. It is the genius of our system that people with deeply held and opposing ideas can clash yet still find ways to collaborate.

JFK's *Profiles in Courage*, written in 1955, influenced me deeply. It is about a handful of Americans who, at critical moments, made decisions that departed from their parties' ideologies, confounded their own supporters and ultimately cost them dearly. It discusses John Quincy Adams, who was removed from his Senate seat for supporting an embargo on British goods that hurt his New England merchant constituents. JFK also notes the case of Robert Taft, the staunchly conservative Republican senator from Ohio who publicly opposed the Nuremberg Trials after World War II. "The trial of the vanquished by the victor cannot be impartial no matter how it is hedged about with the forms of justice," Taft warned. Almost nobody agreed with Taft after the horrors of the Nazi era; his position may have cost him his party's presidential nomination in 1948.

Kennedy named it courage, the willingness to do and say what one thinks is the right thing regardless of consequences. Lugar had it.

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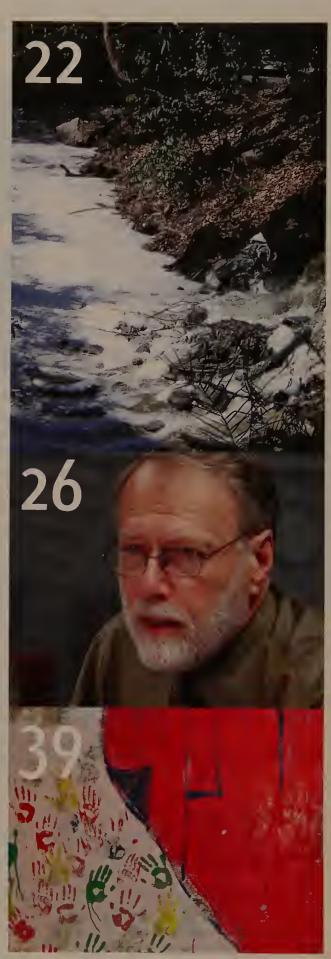
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What isn't working

about church in metaphors of work, as in LeeAnne Watkins's "This just isn't working" (June 13). Can it be that when the author's church "stopped it all," room was made for rest and play, two spiritual practices that may be equally or more important in nurturing abundant life for individuals and communities?

The church, with all its well-intentioned programs, models, curricula and drive toward purpose, does poorly at Sabbath keeping. This is a gift we would do well to receive for ourselves and for the world.

Heather Entrekin christiancentury.org comment

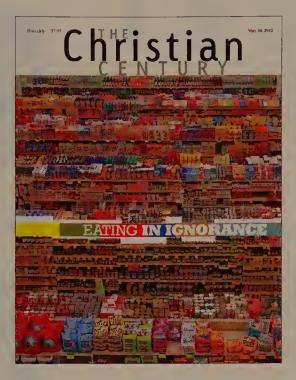
I recently heard a presentation about how different congregations have different personalities and can be typed according to the Myers-Briggs inventory. One kind of congregation will want lots of programs that are well organized. Another will want spiritual and psychological growth, with no accountability. Another is characterized by hands-on ministries to others and is loosely organized. Still another church is strong on world missions and intellectual stimulation and requires organization. Do not try to remake a congregation in your image.

Phil Van Dam christiancentury.org comment

Food and food workers . . .

Thanks to Norman Wirzba for his thoughtful article "Eating in ignorance" (May 30). His discussion of food in the context of "the mind of Christ" and the way he draws on the example of the early church is inspiring and challenging, worth repeated reading.

Yet I am distressed by the way the article rushes past the human beings—migrant and seasonal farmworkers—whose lives



present a much larger area of ignorance for most Americans than the nutritional deficiencies of fast food. Wirzba inadvertently points to one of the reasons for this ignorance in his mention of the civil rights movement: the lack of sustained proximity. He discusses this need for sustained proximity as a requirement for true reconciliation; but he's writing about our relationship with the land, not with farmworkers.

Wirzba asks us to consider "what we can do to make sure that our relationships with chickens contribute to their nurture, health and even delight." I want that question asked in relation to our brother and sister human beings as well, including those who work in the fields, packing plants and fast-food restaurants.

Rachel Diem Ann Arbor, Mich.

Open mind . . .

As a retired United Methodist minister and an admirer of Bishop William H. Willimon, I was startled to read what appeared to be his terse denunciation of "doctrinal sin" ("Sent to serve," May 30). Since my ordination

60 years ago I have treasured Methodism's theological inclusiveness. I have emphasized the role that scripture, tradition, experience and reason are all permitted to play, and I have taken pride in the United Methodist slogan "Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors." I have never favored the recitation of ancient creeds in worship. Such creeds were adopted to enforce conformity, discourage unorthodox thinking and demonize heretics.

Heaven forbid that United Methodism ever insists upon doctrinal toethe-line uniformity. If so, we would lose innumerable God-loving, Christ-serving pastors and parishioners. I prefer to quote John Wesley: "Think and let think!"

Ralph Lord Roy Plantsville, Conn.

Retaining heaven . . .

In response to Rodney Clapp's essay on the "new view" of eschatology ("Life after life after death," May 30) and the report on the revision of traditional views of heaven by people like New Testament scholar N. T. Wright (News, June 13), I say yes to the recovery of the New Testament and creedal accent on the grand finale and its import for seeking justice and peace on this earth—but no to a flirtation with reductionism and the latest reports from the academy that a "comforting belief in an afterlife has no basis in the Bible."

Maybe Carol Zaleski's wise words about an icon ("Meeting Adam," June 13) provide a nice counterpoint to this development, reminding readers of Eastern Orthodoxy's testimony to the luster of a heavenly reality in the now that points toward the fulfillments of the not yet.

Gabriel Fackre West Hyannisport, Mass.

Christian

Women at risk

July 11, 2012

Tiolence Against Women Act stalled as Congress bickers," declared the headline in the *Miami Herald*. The domestic violence law has been running on stopgap funding since it expired last summer. For months, headlines have trumpeted the political wrangling blocking VAWA's reauthorization.

In April, 68 senators—including all the Democrats and all the women—passed an expansive bill. House Republicans responded by pushing through a narrower version. The White House threatened to veto the House bill, strengthening the Senate's hand in negotiating final language. House leadership then reclaimed the momentum by invoking the Constitution's origination clause, which says that bills raising revenue—as one provision in the Senate bill arguably does—must originate in the lower chamber. It's unclear what the full Congress will pass, or when.

The Senate bill includes new protections for gays and lesbians, American Indians and immigrants. Republicans accuse Democrats of inserting these as poison pills, forcing Republicans to vote either for liberal causes or against battered women. But while elected officials like to criticize each other for playing politics, the real question is this: Are the Senate's new provisions good ones?

Without question. According to experts on domestic violence, the three groups in question are underserved. LGBT victims are routinely turned away from shelters and denied protection orders. The Senate bill adds explicit antidiscrimination language; it also earmarks funds for LGBT-focused organizations. While opponents consider these steps redundant, the evidence suggests otherwise.

American Indian women are twice as likely to be sexually assaulted as women generally, and the isolation of reservation life makes the odds worse still. In 86 percent of reported cases, the alleged perpetrator is non-Native. Tribal authorities can't prosecute these abusers; the Senate bill would change that. House Republicans oppose this expansion of tribal power on principle.

Immigrants also face high rates of violence. Abusers often prevent victims from reporting abuse by threatening to have them deported or denied green cards. The federal government combats this silencing by granting a limited number of U Visas to victims, and the Senate bill would increase the number.

On immigration, the House bill takes several steps backward. It eliminates confidentiality for victims seeking visas, requiring authorities to notify the alleged abuser—ostensibly to prevent fraud, though little exists. This would discourage

Immigrants, gays and Native women face particular threats.

reporting, as would a new measure making U Visas temporary. The bill would also transfer visa administration—a sensitive job—from trained specialists to local authorities.

Democrats are anxious to court Latino voters. Indeed, all three demographic groups in question make the Senate's new provisions politically controversial—but they shouldn't. It's a basic right to be protected from violence and to have recourse when this protection fails—whether one is a non-Native, heterosexual citizen or not. Treating people with decency is a fundamental American value, however one feels about same-sex marriage, immigration reform or anything else. Enacting the Senate VAWA bill is simply the right thing to do.

marks

ELEMENT OF LUCK: When Michael Lewis graduated from Princeton with a degree in art history, he decided he wanted to be an author even though he had never published a word in his life. One night at a dinner he sat next to the wife of an executive at Salomon Brothers, an investment bank. She pressed her husband to give Lewis a job, and that job gave him the subject for his first book, Liar's Poke, which sold millions of copies when he was just 28 years old. Speaking to graduates at Princeton this year, Lewis said that successful people take credit for their own success, not realizing how much of it is due to luck—like sitting next to someone at a dinner party. Lewis said that "with luck comes obligation. You owe a debt, and not just to your Gods. You owe a debt to the unlucky" (www.Princeton.edu).

NOTHING SPECIAL: One of the most discussed commencement addresses this year was titled "You are not special." It was given by David McCullough Jr., a popular teacher at Wellesley High School in Massachusetts. "If everyone is special, then no one is," he told the graduates. "By definition there can be only one best. You're it or you're not." When the speech went viral, McCullough was subjected to numerous media interviews, including an appearance on CBS's This Morning. McCullough encouraged graduates to pursue learning for its own exhilaration, not for material advantage. "I urge you to do whatever you do for no reason other than you love it and believe in its significance" (YouTube, June 7, and Newsweek, June 18).

NUNS ON THE BUS: In response to the austerity budget proposed by Rep.

Paul Ryan (R., Wis.) and passed by the House of Representatives, nuns from the National Catholic Social Justice Lobby (known as NETWORK) took a 15-day bus tour to point out the budget's consequences. NETWORK highlighted these problems with the budget: it increases defense spending while cutting programs for people in need; it undermines the food stamp program that millions of people depend on; it begins Medicare's shift to a voucher program which will push many older people into poverty; it gives large tax breaks to the wealthy; and it cuts funding for insurance programs for low-income people. Sister Simone Campbell, executive director of NETWORK, called the budget immoral (MSNBC, June 14).

FAITH AND FICTION: When science fiction writer Ray Bradbury passed away last month, one aspect of his life was largely ignored by those who eulogized him: his faith. Calling himself a Zen Buddhist, Bradbury claimed to be a delicatessen religionist, drawing insights from West and East. Unlike other Buddhists, Bradbury was occupied with "God, sin, forgiveness, grace, and redemption," says Gregory Wolfe. Sam Weller, his biographer, said: "The guy keeps writing about Jesus, but he doesn't consider himself a Christian." According to Bradbury: "The best description of my career as a writer is 'At play in the fields of the Lord" (Patheos, June 18).

FINAL PRAISE: Nonagenarian
Huston Smith, esteemed writer and
scholar of religion, contemplates what
his last line might be as the curtain on
his life falls. "It has all been very interesting," the final words of British author
Elizabeth Pakenham, resonate with him.
He also likes the final words attributed



to St. John Chrysostom and would borrow them as "Thanks for everything! Praise for it all!" (*The Huston Smith Reader*, edited by Jeffery Paine, University of California Press).

HEAVEN ABOVE OR BELOW? In a symposium on whether heaven really exists, atheist John Derbyshire says, essentially, no. Rabbi Shmuley Boteach says that heaven misses the point of religion. While he doesn't deny its existence, he says that as a Jew his job is to think about this world rather than the next. He wants to make the earth itself more heavenly without any thought of reward for having done so. Jonathan Aitken, the Christian contributor to the symposium, shares his near-death experience and asks whether people who have had such an experience get a glimpse into the afterlife. Recognizing the paucity of biblical material on heaven, the longing for such an afterlife comes when we begin to ask, Is this life all there is? Heaven may be a space rather than a place. "Heaven is where God dwells," says Aitken, "and its population will be full of surprises" (American Spectator, June).

RACE FACTOR: People are notoriously reluctant to reveal racial prejudice when completing a survey. One new way to measure racial prejudice is to analyze racially charged Google searches. Since 2008, "Obama" has been a prominent name in such Internet searches. West Virginia is the state with the highest racially charged search rate. Other centers of activity include western Pennsylvania, eastern Ohio, upstate New York and southern Mississippi—all areas where Obama did worse in the 2008 election than John Kerry did in 2004. Without the race factor, President Obama would have won the electoral vote by an even wider margin than he did. In 2012 the race factor could cost him crucial states like Florida, Ohio and possibly Pennsylvania (New York Times, Campaign Stops, June 9).

Walker, author of *The Color Purple*, has refused permission to have her Pulitzer prize—winning novel translated into Hebrew. In a letter to the publisher

66 To somehow view money as not having . . . a corrupting effect on election flies in the face of reality. I just wish one of them had run for county sheriff.

— Sen. John McCain (R., AZ) on the Supreme Court's "Citizens United" decision, which allows unlimited independent funding of elections by corporations and unions. McCain called it "the most misguided, naive, uninformed, egregious decision of the United States Supreme Court . . . in the 21st century," predicting it will lead to scandal (PBS Newshour, June 14).

Moralists (archbishops included) can thunder away as much as they like; but they'll make no difference unless and until people see that there is something transforming and exhilarating about the prospect of a whole community rejoicing together—being glad of each other's happiness and safety. This alone is what will save us from the traps of ludicrous financial greed, of environmental recklessness, of collective fear of strangers and collective contempt for the unsuccessful and marginal. . . . ? ?

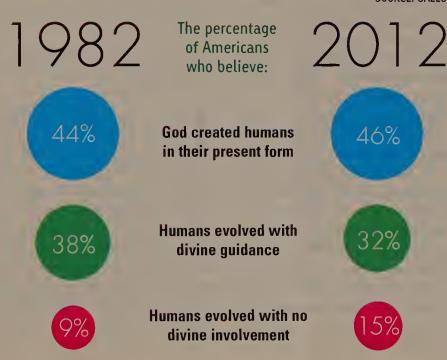
 From Archbishop Rowan Williams's sermon on the occasion of Queen Elizabeth's diamond jubilee, for which he was criticized in the press (Daily Mail, June 5)

Walker said, "Israel is guilty of apartheid and persecution of the Palestinian people, both inside Israel and also in the Occupied Territories" (*Ha'aretz*, June 19).

SPEECH ISN'T FREE: Residents of Middleborough, Massachusetts, voted by a greater than 3–1 ratio to ban

swearing in public. The proposal to ban public profanity came from the police chief. The fine for the violation will be \$20. The ban, officials said, is not meant to curb private conversation, but rather loud profanity used by teens and young adults in parks and other public places (AP).

GOD & EVOLUTION, AMERICAN STYLE



Moving down in the world

by Frank G. Honeycutt

I'M SITTING on Tamassee Knob, a large rock known for its height—1,762 feet above sea level is a surprising elevation for South Carolina. The scenic overlook is only a few miles from the town of Walhalla (pop. 3,500), where I'm a 55-year-old Lutheran pastor.

Tamassee means "Place of the Sunlight of God" in Cherokee, and the morning is filled with brilliant light as well as silence; there was only one other hiker on the trail this morning. In my day pack are a water bottle, banana, journal and Bible. I read from John 4 about the woman at the well and occasionally take a long slow sip of the distant views.

I'm also only a three-hour drive from the bustle of downtown Columbia and the large congregation I served for nine years—but it feels light-years away. Many of my colleagues think of me as lost these days. What in the hell is Frank Honeycutt doing? is the question I heard in the days before I left a "destination church" (as the Alban Institute puts it) for a small, out-of-the-way congregation upstate. Even now I sometimes expect to hear God speak through the wind, asking the question once posed to Elijah: "What are you doing here?" (1 Kings 19:13).

In Open Secrets, Richard Lischer writes about his first appointment to a small Lutheran congregation in southern Illinois: "Of course I knew Christendom needed unstrategic little churches like this one, but I bitterly resented the bureaucrats who had misfiled my gifts, misjudged my obvious promise, and were about to place me in rural confinement." Lischer came to realize the beauty of both place and call. I too am appreciating the beauty of this place and call, although, unlike Lischer, I was called to a

smaller place from a larger place. It's not the usual order of things.

I love the people of the Columbia congregation and am proud of its outreach. With the Salvation Army, we fed 150 homeless people seven nights a week. The services and concert music were majestic. I was part of a race and reconciliation group. (The Confederate flag no longer flies on top of the State House, but there were plenty of other issues to address.) Columbia was an interesting and challenging place to serve.

bridegroom. Was I doing the same thing when I contemplated a departure from Columbia? Was I elevating open spaces to a place of idolatry? Was I running from my call?

A few years back, when I was serving the city church, I began to have trouble keeping up with expectations. It was assumed that we'd see an ever-growing worship attendance, with growth measured in numerical success. I turned to the Bible in my confusion and noted that at times, after Jesus has described what it

In the out-of-the-way town, there is time to make sense of ministry and my own oddness.

But something was missing. Our parish comprised multiple zip codes and several counties. I was in the car a lot and weary of the full-stop traffic jams on the interstate. I once hiked the Appalachian Trail from Maine to Georgia, and I longed for the open spaces of the mountains.

John 4, in which Jesus confronts the woman about her many husbands. The exchange between the two seems almost shockingly rude. Sandra Schneiders has noted that "husband" here is probably an allusion to various idolatries in the life of this woman, since multiple spouses would never have been ethically permissible in first-century Samaria. Perhaps John was referring to all of us who've had love interests other than Jesus, the true

means to follow him, the crowd thins out. He is at the zenith of his popularity before he gives a sermon in Luke 14, but after the sermon the numbers drop. Will somebody give the guy a ten-second delay button so a handler can edit and airbrush his jarring words?

This is what led me to leave: many believed the beauty of our church building and charisma of our pastor should draw crowds. Many, it seemed to me, underestimated how jarring Jesus' words sound in the political culture of a state capital.

The church in Walhalla has an old clock tower dating to the late 1850s. I

Frank G. Honeycutt is pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church in Walhalla, South Carolina. His latest book is The Truth Shall Make You Odd: Speaking with Pastoral Integrity in Awkward Situations (Brazos Press).

climb it often for the view of the town, the church cemetery and Tamassee Knob. Up there, I can see the intricate clockworks tick off each measured second. A friend visited not long after I arrived in town. Kent is an artist who enjoys making small ceramic figures and hiding them along trails in national parks, on railroad river trestles or outside art museums. He and I climbed the church clock tower and hid a small Quasimodo figure in rafters made of massive timbers hewn from local logs by master German builders. I thought the old German Americans out in the graveyard might appreciate the hunchback presiding over their tower.

on Rash, a fiction writer and poet in this region, helps me understand my yearnings. In his poem "Under Jocassee," he invites the reader to board a boat, row out into Lake Jocassee and then look down through the water. The reader sees a road appear, one that existed before the valley was flooded by a hydroelectric project. Then the reader sees, still through the deep, clear water, a woman walking beside a barn. She shivers as she moves through various farm chores. Looking up, she sees that a large cloud is casting the chilling shadow—and at the end of the poem the reader realizes that the shadow is cast by the boat in which he sits.

In Rash's poem, layers of history bubble to the surface of the lake as well as to the reader's mind. I was drawn back to a small town because history seems more readily accessible there, while the city always seems to be moving toward the future at breakneck speed. In the city there was little time for me to ponder or for Jesus to address me as he did the woman at the well-in layers, deep down. I felt as if I was always running from one thing or person to another. As Craig Barnes says in The Pastor as Minor Poet: "The work of Jesus Christ in our lives is to restore the divine image, which has become so distorted that it can no longer be recognized. The distortion came about by our attempts to cram other images into our souls, which made it impossible for us to remember who we were created to be."

Of course, there are new challenges in Walhalla. The music ministry needs work. And after years of having a staff person in charge of youth ministry, I'm that youth minister in Walhalla. Financial and human resources aren't as plentiful, and no one is readily available to cover for me when I go out of town.

But I've recovered the sense of measuring time and am slowly restoring a memory of who I was created to be. There is time to climb a clock tower and plant Quasimodo. There is time to chat with the proprietor of the Walhalla Steak House, where the best chicken in the region is served—but no steak. There is time to linger on the porch of worried parents on a weekday evening and talk about and pray for their son, a soldier in

Afghanistan. There is time to lovingly ponder the word in morning and evening Bible studies (more people show up for class in this small town than in the city). There is time to stroll around town and pray for businesses that have fallen on hard times. There is time to write and make sense of ministry and my own oddness. There is actually time to walk to church from my house less than half a mile away.

And there's time to visit Charles and Billie, a couple in their eighties who've been members at St. John's for their 59 years of marriage. They live about ten miles from Walhalla on a beautiful piece of land at the end of a dirt road. In the early '70s they invited fledgling bands to the "Charlie B Ranch." Fleetwood Mac, Billy Preston, the Marshall Tucker

The pastor

I have just one person left on earth who's been
My friend through grade school, high school, church, and sports,
The pastor says. Meanwhile the winter rain
Explodes on the metal roof like handgun shots,

And it's hard to hear the man go on: Thing is, He's lost his memory. There comes a catch In his throat, a thing that no one here has witnessed Through all his ministry. Here's the trouble, he adds,

I'm left alone with the things we knew together.
Silence ensues, save for a few quiet coughs,
And rustlings of the worship programs' paper.
Then the preacher seems to change his theme right off,

Speaking of Mary, and how she must have suffered When her son referred to his apostolic peers As family, not to her or his brothers, Not to Joseph—as if he forgot the years

Spent in their household, as if he kept no thought Of ties that bind. The congregants are old. They try to listen, but their minds go wandering off To things like the pounding rain outside, so cold

And ugly and loud. The storm, so out of season, So wintry, still improbably recalls The milder months, which vanished in a moment, And which they summon vaguely, if at all.

Sydney Lea

Band, and Blood, Sweat and Tears played at Charlie B's before anyone knew of them. Charlie and Billie showed me the old publicity posters. "There were about 15,000 people," said Charlie, proudly. When I left, I stopped near the old stage in the pasture and imagined a young Stevie Nicks belting out "Landslide."

Toward the end of Jesus' encounter with the unnamed woman at the well,

she "left her water jar and went back to the city," witnessing to her neighbors. The Bible seems to have a consistent fondness for the city, but my pastoral witness is headed in the opposite direction—to an old man's well-tended acreage; to the modest home of twin sisters Linda and Brenda, who dress exactly the same each day, right down to their jewelry (only in the South); to the mountain trailer of talkative, funny Dot, a novelist and former columnist for the *Charlotte Observer*; to 95-year-old violinist Louis, a former orchestra member who accompanies our hymns each Sunday morning. This is the pastoral landscape of Walhalla.

I take a slow sip from the water bottle. Before heading back to the car, I look once more at the vista I missed for almost a decade. I'm grateful to be in this place of the sunlight of God.

The church's way with death

Acquainted with grief

by Matt Fitzgerald

IN A FAMOUS SCENE in the film *The Sixth Sense*, a haunted little boy tells his psychologist that he sees dead people. The doctor asks, "How often do you see them?" The child replies, "All the time. They're everywhere."

As a pastor, I know how he feels. I see them too. At least, I almost do. Years ago, at the end of a three-week stretch that featured four funerals, I went for a jog through my neighborhood. As I ran past houses and apartment buildings, I glanced at the ones where my parishioners lived, and I thought, "They are all going to die. Each one of them will have a coffin." I don't see ghosts. But I do see people headed toward the grave. They're everywhere, especially at church. That is one of the things that church does. It introduces us to a bunch of mortals.

This sounds ridiculous. Every person we meet is going to die. It doesn't matter if the introduction is made at church or at a child's birthday party. The difference is that no one has ever stood up at a child's birthday party to read a list of those who have died in the year between today's cake and last year's celebration. But

many churches do just that on All Saint's Day. People are dying all around us. We would rather ignore this fact, but the church won't let us. Indeed, if I didn't go to church, I'd be tempted to believe that the only people who die are celebrities.

This will change as my peers and I age, but at this point in our lives, most of

Mona Simpson didn't move me to tears, but at a funeral a few days earlier, a church member's son made me cry when he stood at the lectern and said that every time he ever encountered his father, whether it was as a child when his dad picked him up at school, or when he was a teenager and he walked downstairs and

We would like to ignore the fact that people are dying all around us. But the church won't let us.

my friends outside the church are living in an age-segregated bubble where death remains a distant, hidden thing. When Steve Jobs died, his sister Mona Simpson delivered a widely read eulogy that was published in the *New York Times*. An old friend e-mailed it to me with the subject line: "This is the most beautiful thing I've ever read." After I read her words, I shrugged and thought, "I've heard better."

into the kitchen late on a Saturday morning, or when he was a grown man and he visited his father in hospice care, every time—every single time—his father's eyes lit up. His son said, "Every time I ever stepped into his presence I knew that my dad felt joy to see me."

Matt Fitzgerald is senior pastor of Saint Paul's United Church of Christ in the Lincoln Park neighborhood of Chicago.

I hear beautiful eulogies all the time—not because the eulogists are better writers than Mona Simpson but because the church has let me grow to love the ones whom we are grieving. I have grown used to mourning. This means that when death comes for my loved ones, the fact of mortality is not going to blindside me. I will still grieve, of course. But death itself will not surprise me. I already know its sting. I have grieved before. This is true for anyone who joins a church. But it is not always true for others.

Several times each year I work with grieving men and women who have not stepped into a church in ages. I recently planned a funeral for a 97-year-old woman. I did the preparation with her grandson, a very fit, very alive man in his early fifties. As we walked through the sanctuary on our way to my office, he told me that he had not been in the church since his confirmation. "It hasn't changed a bit," he said.

When we sat down he immediately broke down. He told me, "I can't believe she's gone. It is so unfair. How could she be dead?" I am enough of a pastor to know not to answer such questions, but some part of me, probably the part formed by the church, wanted to reply, "Ninety-seven? That's how."

Not only did the poor man have to grieve his grandmother, he also had to wrestle with the concept of death. He was suddenly confronted with the fact of death, with the imminence of his own death and with the inevitability of his children's deaths. He was suddenly aware of the specter that looms over all of us, a power we try so hard to avoid seeing, but a power that the church forces us to reckon with.

Regular churchgoing does not make you a friend of death, but if you sit in the pews long enough, you cannot help getting acquainted. In the church you meet some lovely people. And some of them die during your time there. This is a most unlikely gift, but it is a gift that churchgoing keeps on giving. It starts early, gradually, as children form friendships with elderly adults who are not their parents.

I still remember the first funeral I attended. It was for one of my Sunday

school teachers, a woman in her eighties named Mrs. Newhouse. I still remember the minister standing over her coffin and reading these words: "We are conscious of others who have died and well aware of our own frailty on this earth."

Those sentences did not have anything to do with Mrs. Newhouse (which isn't to say that we didn't grieve her death that day; plenty of tears were shed). But the pain we experience at the death of a friend is more slippery than it first appears. Perhaps some of the tears we spill are actually shed for ourselves. Mrs. Newhouse's coffin pointed toward my own. "Jesus wept," the gospel says. But he didn't weep in the abstract. He cried at the grave of his friend, just when he was beginning to realize the inevitability of his own death. Standing before his friend's grave, Jesus was suddenly, even rudely, reminded of the frailty of his own existence on this earth.

When we mourn at funerals, we don't only grieve the dead. We are also the objects of our own despair, which means that when our tears have dried, we emerge rehearsed and readied for the inescapability of our own death. Of

course, our faith proclaims that death precedes resurrection, rather than being an end unto itself. But that is a future promise. In the meantime—that is, this lifetime—death remains a fact, but a fact whose grip grows weaker as it becomes familiar.

All of this is to say that I see a difference between the grief of active churchgoers and the pain of those who stay away. Everyone hurts, of course. But when death comes for a family member, there is often a sturdiness, a resiliency and a healthy sort of acceptance in the eyes of those who have baked cookies to serve at memorial teas, who have sung hymns at funerals of old saints or who have sat down, surprised to see an empty spot in the pew where a friend from a church committee had worshiped only weeks before. Churchgoers have grieved before; they've already felt death's sting.

In their pain I see a strength that exists before I begin my uncertain, pious talk about the afterlife—a realism and grit that might surprise those who assume that Christian comfort rests on nothing but belief in things unseen.

Psalm

"An Engine against the Almighty"
—George Herbert, Prayer (1)

We wrestle, gentle Jehovah, gentle beast, or rather ring bearer, keeper of dirt and sleet under streetlights. A kingdom, weightless, entrusted to the white palms of a child. A garden with a certain desert distance, an angel interference: this late-night duel. I know the sound of wind as well as I know the remnant of your footprint. Or is that the mark of my knees in the dirt?

C. Dylan Bassett

chews

Sources include:
Religion News Service (RNS)
Ecumenical News International (ENInews)
denominational news services

SBC elects first black president

Pointing heavenward and wiping away tears, pastor Fred Luter was elected in New Orleans as the first black president of the predominantly white Southern Baptist Convention. "To God be the glory for the things that he has done," said Luter moments after more than 7,000 Southern Baptists leapt to their feet, cheered and shouted "Hallelujah" when he was declared their next leader.

Luter, 55, a former street preacher who brought his mostly black New Orleans congregation back from near annihilation after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, will lead the nation's largest Protestant denomination for at least a year. Most Southern Baptist presidents traditionally serve two one-year terms.

Rather than rally behind a traditional white conservative candidate, white Southern Baptists leaders had for more than a year urged the nomination and election of Luter. Many said it was long past time for such a move for a denomination that was born in 1845 in a defense of slavery.

"We have the opportunity to make history, to show a watching world the truth about our savior and ourselves," David Crosby, pastor of the mostly white First Baptist Church of New Orleans, said in his nomination of Luter on June 19. "Let's give our ballots a voice and shout out to the world—Jesus is Lord! This is our president! We are Southern Baptists!"

Crosby's church, which sustained less damage after Katrina, shared space with Luter's remaining congregants after the hurricane.

Members of black Southern Baptist churches—which make up about 8 percent of the SBC's 45,000 congregations—have hailed the expected elec-

tion. Some said they were shocked and never thought they'd live to see such an occurrence.

In previous years, black Southern Baptists attended the two-day annual meeting in limited numbers. Some complained that they seldom saw people who look like them speaking from the platform. This year, more blacks attended than usual and ushers came from Luter's Franklin Avenue Baptist Church.

In the months before the election, SBC ethicist Richard Land was embroiled in controversy for saying President Obama and civil rights leaders had exploited the case of Trayvon Martin, the unarmed Florida teen who was killed by a neighborhood watch volunteer. Land—reprimanded and stripped of his radio talk show as a result of

the racial tension his remarks caused—was among those who cheered Luter's election.

"Today was as truly a historic moment as Southern Baptist life will ever experience," said Land, who helped craft the denomination's 1995 statement that apologized for the "deplorable sin" of racism. "Praise God for his redeeming grace."

Many said before his election that Luter deserved to be elected not because he is black but because of his commitment to the denomination, preaching skills and success in rebuilding his church into one of the largest in Louisiana. A recent survey by the SBC's LifeWay Research found that the majority of Southern Baptist pastors were ready for a black president.



HISTORIC ELECTION: Culminating a year of anticipation, Southern Baptists elected Fred Luter Jr. as their first black president June 19 in New Orleans at the denomination's annual meeting. Shown giving the final sermon of the preceding pastors' conference, Luter was a clear choice for the mostly white Southern Baptist Convention.

Luter closed out the annual pastors' conference on the eve of the Southern Baptist meeting and had the audience on its feet as he waved his Bible in a fervent sermon.

"Only the Word of God can change the heart of a racist; only the Word of God can change the desire of a child molester," he preached. "The Word of God can change the lifestyle of a homosexual. The Word of God is the only hope for America today."

On June 18, at the end of the SBC's National African American Fellowship business meeting, the group's president reminded members to be sure they had their packet of ballots with them for the next day's vote.

"If you never cast a vote before, you need to cast this one," James Dixon urged, drawing laughter and an "Amen." "If you need a class on it, we will teach you how to do it."

Dixon said, "We've been working on this for years," making sure that African Americans were considered for elective office, but noted that white leaders made an unusually hefty push for Luter. "In reality, that's where it needed to come from," he said.

Anticipation of the vote continued as the meeting opened. "We cannot undo our past, but here in New Orleans you can show the world we are redoing our future," said Chuck Kelley Jr., president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Many have tied Luter's election to the need for greater evangelism among racial and ethnic minorities as the denomination suffered its fifth consecutive year of a decline in membership.

Prior to the election, outgoing SBC President Bryant Wright in his farewell address cautioned that Southern Baptists should not get sidetracked in their evangelism efforts by debates over "finer points" of theology.

"If we pride ourselves more on being a traditional Southern Baptist or more on being a Calvinist or a Reformed theologian more than we are thankful that we are Christ-centered and biblically based and known by our fellow man that way," Wright warned, "then it is time to repent of theological idolatry."—Adelle M. Banks, RNS

Catholic theologians stand up to the Vatican

Over the past 50 years, the practice of thinking theologically in the Roman Catholic Church has slowly shifted from a practical craft to train the next generation of clerics to a wider field of study that employs perspectives from across the scholarly spectrum.

As Catholic theology has branched out, bishops—who have the ultimate teaching authority in the church—have struggled to curb theological thinking they consider a potential source of confusion for the lay faithful. As a result, in recent years the bishops have criticized the work of a number of prestigious American theologians.

In St. Louis, members of the Catholic Theological Society of America spoke against the Vatican's recent denunciation of Sister Margaret Farley's 2006 book, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics*, in which the bishops found "grave problems." We must "learn to say 'stop' to those who abuse authority only to preserve it," William O'Neill, of the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley, told assembled scholars.

On June 4, the Vatican's orthodoxy watchdog office, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, released a five-page "notification" about Farley's book, saying her writing on sexual ethics did not conform to the teachings of the magisterium, the church's teaching authority through the pope and bishops. Pope Benedict XVI had approved the notification March 16.

"Sister Farley either ignores the constant teaching of the Magisterium or, where it is occasionally mentioned, treats it as one opinion among others," the notification said. It declared the book could not be used "either in counseling and formation, or in ecumenical and interreligious dialogue."

On June 7, the board of the Catholic Theological Society of America issued a statement supporting Farley, a past president of the group and a professor emerita at Yale Divinity School. The board said her work "has prompted a generation of theologians to think more deeply about

the Christian meaning of personal relationships and the divine life of love that truly animates them."

The statement acknowledged, as Farley did in her own statement, that *Just Love* contained ideas that were contrary to church teaching. But, it said, Farley's purpose was to "explore questions of keen concern" to Catholics, which "is one very legitimate way of engaging in theological inquiry that has been practiced throughout the Catholic tradition."

The wider CTSA membership agreed with the board, later approving a motion to endorse the statement.

Last year, the group responded similarly after the doctrine committee of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops criticized the work of another theologian, Sister Elizabeth Johnson, a professor at Fordham University.

John Thiel, a professor of religious studies at Fairfield University and the CTSA's president, said that while Catholic theologians take the teachings of the church seriously, their role is not simply to repeat those official teachings.

"Sometimes Catholic theologians raise questions about that teaching and offer perspectives and new understandings of what the church's teachings might one day be," he said.

Robert Schreiter, a professor at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, said Farley is the victim of a Vatican culture of control over the very nature of religious thinking. "The issue is about understanding different dimensions of theology," he said. "Rome is berating Margaret for not doing the kind of theology they want done."

Peter Phan, a Georgetown University theology professor whose work also has been investigated by the bishops, said *Just Love* is about Christian social ethics. "Margaret spent her career teaching at Yale, in an ecumenical context," he said. "Her duty as a theologian is to expand, not simply repeat."

At a session organized to discuss the Vatican notification, Farley spoke publicly about it for the first time, telling hundreds of her colleagues that the previous week had been the culmination of a three and a half year debate with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith—a conversation that had

taken place entirely through the president of her order, the Sisters of Mercy, she said.

"The judgment was that the book was not consistent with valid expressions of Catholic theology," Farley said, "which implies that anything I write ought to be about that."

The Vatican said "among the many errors and ambiguities" of her book were "its positions on masturbation, homosexual acts, homosexual unions, the indissolubility of marriage and the problem of divorce and remarriage."

"There are terribly important questions, and other than to say that I have a defective knowledge of natural law, these were not addressed," Farley said. A "profoundly important" question for Catholic theologians, Farley said, is: "Should power settle questions of truth?"

In its notification, the Vatican said its original purpose for investigating Just Love was because "doctrinal errors" in it are "a cause of confusion among the faithful."

But Richard Gaillardetz, a theology professor at Boston College, said the bishops' use of the phrase "confusion of the faithful" was "infuriating" and "an ongoing problem we see in these statements."

Throughout her career at Yale, Farley developed a knack for finding herself in the middle of theological controversy, she said. Her students asked her all the time why she stayed in a church that so often pushed back against her work.

Because the church "is still a source of real life for me," she would tell them. "It's worth the struggle. It's worth getting a real backbone that has compassion tied to it." —Tim Townsend, St. Louis Post-Dispatch

Ex-nun offers tips for supporting Catholic sisters

A national official for the United Church of Christ says she applauds the courage of the large group of U.S. Catholic nuns under heavy criticism from the Vatican. "I pray for their wisdom, eloquence and continued confidence in working toward change which must come," wrote Susan A. Blain, a UCC minister who was a sister for 11 years before deciding

lowed a call to be ordained in the Protestant body and serves at the Cleveland headquarters as the UCC's minister for worship, liturgy and spiritual formation. "It is painful to witness all that is transpiring" for the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), which was faulted for pro-

gressive leanings in doctrine and current social issues, she said.

"But if I am pained, I often find my Protestant sisters and brothers quite bewildered at how to respond," said Blain. She made suggestions in an article posted June 12 on the UCC's website:

• Forget generalizations about nuns in the news; engage the sisters you do know from ecumenical ministries. Ask about changes since the Second Vatican Council and how sisters have experimented with democratic and consensus models of governance. "Note to UCC: sisters who have

succeeded in this have generally not gotten stuck on Robert's Rules."

• Recognize the complexity in Catholic institutions. "Media attention, which may depict the sisters as hapless victims of church authority, doesn't do the sisters justice." Many religious orders do not answer directly to bishops. "Our American Protestant popular-democracysteeped responses to a deep Catholic conflict may not be the most helpful."

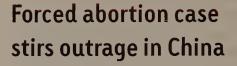
Protestants may split off from the old structure whereas Catholics at an impasse may make every effort to stay,

> going deeper into the tradition to find a way to stay in communion "and effect transformation however long it takes."

• Offer solidarity where it counts. "Historically, sisters have lived among, cared for, given voice to and fought for justice for those people whom social systems and 'safety nets' leave behind." Write letters of support to

sisters, to local dioceses, the LCWR and NETWORK, a social justice lobby in Washington founded by sisters.

• Read and quote the theological writings of sisters, including those who have been recently reprimanded or silenced by the Vatican, including Margaret Farley, Yale professor emerita, Elizabeth A. Johnson of Fordham University and Ivone Gebara of Recife, Brazil. Read the works of those who have not had the "Vatican Bump" in publicity and sales and "anything" by Joan Chittister, OSB. —John Dart



The case of the pregnant woman who was dragged to a hospital by authorities and forced to have an abortion has enraged the Chinese and sparked an online flurry of debate over whether it is time to end China's draconian one-child family planning policy.

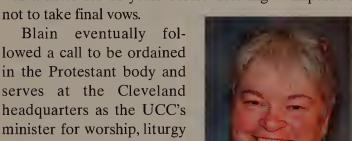
"Our country is the inventor of family planning committees-how couldn't we have accumulated enough experience after so many years? Must they kill people? Cold-blooded scum!" television director Liu Kang said in an online posting.

The scandal erupted when photos were posted online showing the mother, Feng Jiamei, lying on a hospital bed with the corpse of her daughter. Feng, who was in her seventh month of pregnancy, said she was dragged into a vehicle, her head covered and her legs beaten, then taken to a hospital for the injections that killed and induced delivery of her unborn child.

Feng said she was forced to have an abortion because she could not pay the \$6,300 fine for a second child.

In years past, Feng's forced abortion would have happened with little public reaction, but Internet-based social media tools now allow individual Chinese to take their stories directly to the people and are forcing the government to address complaints.

As of June 14, comments on Feng's abortion neared 1 million on the Twitterlike microblog site Sina Weibo. Many of



Susan A. Blain

the comments were calls to relax the restrictions on births that have been enforced for more than three decades.

Many couples are barred from having a second child in China, the world's most populous country, where the ruling Communist Party enforces the ban through a vast birth control bureaucracy, heavy fines and the threat of violence.

The government's first reaction to the outcry over Feng was that the abortion was merely routine law enforcement. A statement posted June 11 on the government website of Zhenping County in Shaanxi province stated that officials, "according to the law, carried out the termination of the out-of-policy second pregnancy of Feng Jiamei" on June 2.

As the fury grew, a preliminary investigation was conducted, after which the government admitted June 14 that it was wrong. The late-term abortion was a "serious violation" of national policies, "damaged the image of family planning work and caused extremely harmful social impact," said a statement by the Shaanxi Population and Family Planning Commission.

Three officials were suspended, the China News Service reported. The city mayor delivered \$785 as compensation for the loss to Feng's husband, Deng Jiyuan. It may take much more to calm the storm.

"I am not satisfied with the result," Deng said. "I want the real killer responsible to be punished." On their newly opened microblogs, Feng and Deng, who have a five-year-old daughter, have been conversing with Chinese who expressed their anger at authorities and support for the couple.

"I wish this case could be the turning point in China's family planning policy, to comfort the spirit of this child in heaven," wrote Zheng Haitao, a financial magazine editor.

He Yafu, an independent demographer, said any hope of change must await the party leadership transition this fall and a new cabinet next spring. He advocates abolition of the policy and says doing so would have minimal effect on China's birthrate. A major obstacle is that authorities have come to rely on the fines they can levy, He said.

Ignoring threats warning him not to

get involved, lawyer Zhang Kai said he was traveling to Shaanxi to assist the couple. "I think governments shouldn't 'plan' family planning, it's the citizen's right," Zhang said. "God won't allow humans to do forced abortions, and he's unhappy to see it." —Calum MacLeod, USA Today

Unchurched are key bloc in Washington State's vote on gay marriage

Conservatives in Washington State have claimed victory by collecting double the signatures needed to send the state's same-sex marriage law to voters in this year's general election.

And while leaders from Preserve Marriage Washington are confident residents will vote to keep marriage between a man and a woman, a wild card lies in their path—one that's worth more than 4 million votes.

According to the 2010 U.S. Religion Census, more than half of the state's 6.8 million residents don't belong to a faith group. Preserve Marriage Washington, the organization behind the gay marriage petition (Referendum 74), is a coalition of community and religious groups, including the Washington State Catholic Conference.

"Almost 4.4 million people are unclaimed, so that's the group that, if they vote, will decide this referendum," said Patricia O'Connell Killen, editor of *Religion and Public Life in the Pacific Northwest: The None Zone*, and academic vice president at Gonzaga University. "Any political issue, whether it passes or fails, depends by and large on how the vast majority of these unchurched are persuaded."

A similar vote to override a gay marriage law in Maryland is also scheduled for November, as well as a proposed constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage in Minnesota. In Maine, voters will be asked whether to overturn a 2009 referendum that banned gay marriage.

Killen said evangelical and Catholic leaders in the state are actively working

to overturn the same-sex marriage law, but she said it's impossible to know how much influence they have over the unchurched.

Joseph Backholm, chairman of Preserve Marriage Washington, said that there's no way to know how many of the signatures collected came from the state's unaffiliated population.

"I think there's a collective wisdom about this subject, a common understanding of what marriage is and there's plenty of unchurched people who look at this passionately and conclude that marriage should between a man and a woman," he said.

Washington has had a domestic partnership law since 2007. In 2009, an "everything but marriage" expansion of that law was passed, allowing same-sex domestic partners the same rights and benefits that Washington State offers married couples.

Gov. Chris Gregoire signed a fullfledged gay marriage bill earlier this year but put it on hold pending the November referendum.

Zach Silk, campaign manager for Washington United for Marriage, which supports same-sex marriage, said the conservative movement is stronger and more energized this time around. "They have a very impressive track record of winning these campaigns, and we expect them to spend millions to roll back the law," Silk said.

Backholm said his side has more energy because redefining marriage is a grander issue. "People in Washington want to treat people fairly, want them to have the same access to freedom and health care and everything else, but that doesn't mean we have to redefine marriage. That doesn't mean children don't deserve a mother and a father," he said.

A recent poll conducted by Seattle-based Strategies 360 reported that 54 percent of voters in the state think it should be legal for same-sex couples to marry.

Silk said he's encouraged by the figures but added that gay marriage supporters are the underdogs—at least at the voting booth. In 32 states that have held public votes on gay marriage, voters have sided with those opposed to samesex unions. —Tracy Simmons, RNS

Stuttering doesn't stop a call to ministry

Tom Sherrod, an ordained United Methodist minister, loathed to "declare" a couple man and wife.

As a stutterer, Sherrod always had problems with hard "c" sounds, and the "c" in *declare* was a doozy. "P" sounds weren't easy either, and the Bible is full of them. "If I tried to read, I would lock onto words," said Sherrod, a North Carolina hospital chaplain. "I tried to steer clear of certain scriptures."

Now, after intensive speech therapy, Sherrod publicly reads aloud whatever parts of the liturgy he likes. But before he learned to control the stutter, life was an exhausting exercise in avoiding some tough words and muscling through others.

A stuttering pastor, priest or rabbi sounds like the beginning of a bad joke, but they are out there—ministering to the sick, comforting the bereaved and spreading the Word, even if the word may not sound perfect every time.

Increasingly, clergy who stutter are willing to talk about their stuttering and about how a profession that rewards inspiring speech can be open to those with speech impediments. The message from these clergy is often this: a stutterer can do the job well. But first there will be a struggle, both to minimize and to accept one's stuttering. That fight, though, can make for a stronger spiritual leader.

"I think I became a rabbi not despite my stuttering but precisely because of it," said Mark Glickman, who leads two Reform congregations in Washington State. "It was really a way of facing down my own demons."

Glickman, like all the clergy interviewed for this story, had a serious stutter in his youth that improved markedly with speech therapy later in life. Sometimes when these men speak—and stutterers are most often men—the stutter is hardly noticeable.

Ronald Webster, a Virginia speech researcher and clinician who treated Sherrod, said that about 1 percent of people—across cultures—stutter. It's a



COPING WITH AN IMPEDIMENT: Gerald McDermott, an Anglican priest who preaches at a Lutheran church on Sundays and teaches religion at Virginia's Roanoke College during the week, considers himself more approachable because he once stuttered badly—and still stutters occasionally. McDermott is pictured here at the christening of his fifth grandchild, Phinehas McDermott.

disorder rooted in physiology, not anxiety or other emotional issues, as was once thought. Speech therapy is typically helpful, Webster said, and clergy—Webster has treated about half a dozen—enjoy particularly good results.

"They tend to be more disciplined in their approach to therapy than someone who has not been faced with the immense pressure of public speaking," he said.

Even those who have enjoyed dramatic improvement in their speech still stutter sometimes.

Glickman has learned to be fine with this. "Being a stutterer has made me more sensitive. It's made me more real with congregants," he said.

Gerald McDermott, an Anglican priest who preaches at a Lutheran church on Sundays and teaches religion at Virginia's Roanoke College during the week, also considers himself more approachable because he once stuttered badly—and still stutters occasionally.

"It shows people that you suffered,"

he said. "And I find that more people come to me for counseling because of it."

In his hospital chaplaincy, Sherrod said his stuttering has given him particular insight into patients whose physical limitations render them unable to say what they want to say—particularly stroke victims. "When the body betrays you, it can be extremely frustrating and irritating," Sherrod said. "It's taken me a long time to see my stuttering as a gift to connect to people."

But if stuttering can be an asset postordination, it can also be a daunting obstacle for those contemplating a clerical career. McDermott, who now lectures internationally and speaks on radio and television, recalls his own pastor's response when he expressed an interest in teaching religion: "I don't think so, Gerry. You stutter too much."

Glickman's father, a stutterer himself and always encouraging to his son, questioned whether rabbinical school made sense for a stutterer. "I used to think of heaven as the ability to talk freely," Sherrod said, "without having to worry about whether I could express myself or not."

Fortunately, stuttering clergy have a strong role model in Moses. Though the Bible does not expressly call Moses a stutterer, that's how Exodus 4:10 is frequently interpreted as Moses tells God that he doesn't want to be his spokesman: "Moses said to the LORD, O my LORD, I have never been eloquent . . . I am slow of speech, and slow of tongue."

Moses will certainly hold a prominent place in a book on famous stutterers that McDermott plans to write. He noted that Philipp Melanchthon, a founder of Lutheranism and Martin Luther's "righthand man," also stuttered.

And while God sent Aaron to help Moses communicate, Glickman said it's notable that God requires Moses to keep talking despite his slow tongue. "It might not be pretty and perfect and glitzy and polished, but I need you to speak" is how Glickman interprets God's response. "And indeed God tells Moses to speak over 70 times. When Moses gets in trouble, it's because he doesn't speak up." —Lauren Markoe, RNS

Supreme Court tosses case of 'Christian candy cane'

An appeal over Christmas sweets turned bitter in June when the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear the so-called "Christian candy cane" case. The case from Texas has become a rallying point for conservative Christians concerned about free religious expression in public schools and students' ability to distribute religious literature.

The case, *Morgan v. Swanson*, kicked off nine years ago in the Plano Independent School District when principals prevented self-described evangelical students from distributing religious literature on school grounds.

In one instance, principal Lynn Swanson stopped third-grader Jonathan Morgan from distributing a Christian-themed bookmark at a winter break party. The boy wanted to hand out candy cane—shaped pens along with a card purporting to explain the holiday treat's Christian roots.

The card read in part: "So, every time you see a candy cane, remember the message of the candy maker: Jesus is the Christ!"

In another instance, principal Jackie Bomchill prevented second-grader Stephanie Versher from passing out Passion play tickets and pencils with the message, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so" on school grounds.

Last year, the New Orleans-based 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals found the principals were within their rights in stopping the candy canes but also found restrictions on student speech unconstitutional.

The principals were exempt under "qualified immunity," which protects government officials from violating a law that is not "clearly established."

The Supreme Court's decision not to intervene means that ruling stands.

Hiram Sasser, who represented the families on behalf of the Texas-based Liberty Institute law firm, was disappointed in the latest decision.

"We were hoping to finally put this issue to rest: that government school officials should be held accountable

when they violate the law and students' First Amendment rights. No student should be subjected to religious discrimination by the government," he said in a press release.

Dallas attorney Tom Brandt, who represented the two principals, said the case was never about First Amendment speech but rather protection for teachers. "Educators must be allowed to make decisions that are in the best interest of an entire school without fear of individual retribution when the law is unclear," he said.

While the educators' immunity question is settled, other parts of the case continue to work their way through the district and circuit court levels, and Sasser said there's still a possibility to win on students' rights.

"I'm concerned that some government school officials received the wrong message, which is that if they violate the law, no court is going to hold them accountable," Sasser said in a telephone interview. "Hopefully the message is that from now on, government officials (teachers) will be held accountable." —Chris Lisee, RNS

Conservative Jews' shift on gay rites causes no stir

The Conservative Jewish movement established guidelines in early June for the marriage of gay and lesbian couples. The reaction so far? Hard to find.

Asked if there had been any pushback, Rabbi Julie Schonfeld, executive vice president of the movement's Rabbinical Assembly, said "just the opposite."

"There is a tremendous sense of appreciation, of celebration," Schonfeld said. "The guidance is considered thoughtful and helpful to do what it was intended to do . . . to bring sanctity between people who want to build a Jewish home."

Conservative Judaism, which sits between the more liberal Reform and the more traditional Orthodox, lifted the ban on the ordination of gay rabbis in 2006.

As for same-sex marriages, it has been 12 years since the Reform movement of Judaism—largest within the U.S.—gave rabbis the right to perform same-sex marriages. For years, though, some

Conservative rabbis have also been performing these marriages.

The new guidelines outline two possible marriage ceremonies for same-sex couples, which clergy are free to adapt. The guidelines passed the Rabbinical Assembly's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards by a 13–0 vote, with one abstention.

Schonfeld said there are rabbis within the Conservative movement who do not want to perform same-sex marriages. It should be clear that they don't have to. "We are a big-tent movement," she said. —Lauren Markoe, RNS

People

■ Richard J. Mouw, a widely respected evangelical scholar and leader, has announced he will retire as president of Fuller Theological Seminary in June 2013, marking 20 years at the helm of the nation's largest theological school. Mouw, 72, who is also professor of Christian philosophy at the main campus in Pasadena, California, said he will take a study leave during the 2013-2014 academic year, then return in a faculty role. Mouw came to Fuller in 1985 after teaching philosophy for 17 years at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He served as Fuller's provost and senior vice president before being named president. Author of 19 books, including Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World, Mouw is active in ecumenical and interreligious discussions, including dialogs with Mormon and Muslim scholars. Mouw established regional campuses in Arizona, Seattle, Houston, and Colorado Springs and in other parts of California.

Rabbi Rick Jacobs, 56, has been installed as president of the Union for Reform Judaism, succeeding Rabbi Eric Yoffie, who held the post for 16 years. The Reform movement of more than 900 American and Canadian synagogues takes a less traditional approach to the faith than Conservative or Orthodox Judaism. The installation was steeped in music and dance, reflecting Jacob's former career and continued interest in modern dance.

The Word

Sunday, July 15 Mark 6:14–29

WHEN MY SON was about five years old (he's currently a very old seven) we spent an afternoon with a group of friends. The kids disappeared to play in the basement, and the parents gathered around in the kitchen to catch up. We snacked and told stories. There was lots of laughter. It was the kind of carefree, laughter-all-around gathering that I dearly love. Then my son and his best friend came upstairs, both in tears.

"He hit me!" the friend accused.

My son—hit someone? He's never been a hitter. So I was shocked—outraged, horrified, confused—especially when he admitted that he had hit his friend. And in a swift moment I decided and spoke: "If you can't behave, we have to go home."

The full story was that my son intended only to give his friend the kind of lighthearted punch exchanged among friends, but he had a bit more *oomph* behind his hand than either of them expected. No one was hurt, and it hadn't been malicious. But by the time that story came out, we were saying our hasty regrets and leaving.

I still don't know if the offense warranted leaving the party, but once I had said the words, I didn't think I could stay. How could I, in the future, set out credible consequences for my child if I changed my mind about this one? What would my friends—other parents who make similar statements and follow through—think if I went back on my word? So we packed up our things and went home for an afternoon that was much less fun than the one we'd been having. Neither my son nor I was happy with how events turned out.

In this Sunday's lectionary passage, Herod doesn't speak out of anger or frustration; instead it's the opposite. Sated from an evening held in his honor, filled with good food and drink, he's quite pleased with daughter Herodias and the entertainment she's provided for his party. So he makes her an offer: I will give you anything you desire.

He seems to anticipate a request for property or riches, given his offer of "even half of my kingdom." I wonder if the girl had visions of land or jewels or money dancing through her head when she went to her mother (also named Herodias). Perhaps she was already imagining a much different life for herself. But instead of any of those things, the girl's mother instructs her to ask for John's head on a platter. Did Herod see that as a possibility? Surely he knew about the grudge his wife held against the Baptizer. John was in Herod's

prison, after all, because Herod was trying to appease his wife—and perhaps keep her from killing John herself.

There's a collective "ugh" from modern readers when the girl asks for John's head. Most of our society is too civilized to comprehend such a violent show of death; thankfully, a human head on a platter is not a common sight. Is this death sentence more shocking because it comes from a girl at the behest of her mother? Because it happens at a party? Or is it Herod's spinelessness that makes us queasy?

"The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her." It's hard to establish or maintain authority when we get connected to a statement that we later regret.

I have little sympathy for Herod: stand up for what you believe to be right, you spineless moron, I want to admonish him. The scripture tells us that Herod actually liked to listen to John, even if he was perplexed by what he heard. And Herod feared John, though apparently not as much as he feared losing his credibility among his peers. Not entirely unlike Pilate, who was intrigued, perplexed, but ultimately unwilling to go against the crowd, Herod caves on what we might see as the right and just thing to do in order to be faithful to a promise he made.

There's the rub, right? On the surface, remaining faithful to a promise seems like a good thing. We usually praise people who uphold their oaths. But clearly there are situations when there's more to consider. Being a flip-flopper is far better than standing firmly on the wrong side of justice or life. We can talk about politicians and world leaders who change their minds. We could lift up examples of those who have stood firmly committed to their record on an issue, and those who have voted or spoken on both sides of an issue. But that doesn't help me be a better parent—and it doesn't keep John the Baptizer alive.

I made my son apologize before we left the party. After we both calmed down, we had a conversation about our choices and the impact they have. I have since decided that I should have thought through the impact of my words before speaking them. I don't think that my decision was wrong—my regret about my words is far more selfish: I was having fun and wanted to stay at the party.

Being consistent and following through on statements that have a consequence is important, but there would have been value in the interactions after the apology between my son and his friend. And more difficult, but ultimately more valuable for me, would have been the conversation among the parents about what happens when someone who holds the power changes her mind or goes back on her word.

Reflections on the lectionary

Sunday, July 22 *Mark 6:30–34, 53–56*

IN 1991 I ATTENDED the ELCA National Youth Gathering in Dallas with thousands of other high school kids from across the country and around the world for worship, service and Bible study. In addition to being fun and exciting, the trip expanded my view of and encounter with the church. I grew up in a small town in northern Minnesota, after all, where I was used to worshiping regularly with about 70 people. So I still get the chills when I remember saying the Lord's Prayer with 27,000 "new friends" and hearing it echo throughout a convention center.

I remember how my parents told others at church about the trip later. They'd say, with an amused smile, that when they picked me up from the bus I didn't stop talking during the two-and-a-half-hour drive home. "And then," they'd add with a dramatic pause (and some relief), "she slept."

Mark tells us about a time when the disciples gave in to their fatigue. "The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, 'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.' For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves."

Jesus listens patiently to all of them, perhaps interjecting a bit of advice for next time, gently curtailing a more zealous comment and asking some intentional

questions so that everyone has a turn at sharing. Then he tucks them in for a nap, saying, "Come away and rest a while."

But many of us would resist Jesus' command to rest. For me, it takes a tenday road trip by bus combined with a

high-energy gathering before I'll agree to "go quietly" and "rest." To my own detriment, I stay up late and get up early if it means talking with friends. I forego naps because I might miss something. When I hear Jesus gently guide the apostles to rest, I look around frantically at all that needs to be done—the people with wounds, the crowds wanting to see Jesus—and can't imagine Jesus or his disciples resting. There's still so much to be done, Jesus—what do you mean, rest?

That Jesus? He's pretty smart.

The disciples listen to Jesus' instructions—they get in the boat and sail away to a deserted place where we can imagine they slept, washed their things and regrouped. This is what happens after an amazing experience—the laundry needs to be

done, there's still worship for the 75 faithful gathered at the local congregation and daily tasks are waiting. If we read the selection as indicated, skipping some 20 verses in the middle, it seems as if Jesus just keeps working—healing, teaching and listening. This is Jesus as his busy, holy self. He's Jesus, after all, and while I need my sleep, maybe he doesn't.

But there's that big gap in the lectionary passage for this Sunday. Usually I don't quibble with lectionary decisions. This time, though, we miss out on a narrative cycle that includes not only the next big adventure for the disciples (the feeding of the 5,000) but also an important and oft-neglected piece: Jesus goes away to pray by himself.

I cherish the scripture that tells me Jesus retreated. It isn't just the sleep that is necessary; it's that the rest insists on the disciples' attention. The day-to-day flurry of activity needs to be interspersed with time for prayer and rest. All too often I end the day with a to-do list that's longer than when I started. While I'm driving home, I usually think of one more person I should have called, one more situation I should have checked. I hear and see people clamoring for Jesus; certainly I must be the only one who can row his boat to shore. Right?

Obviously there's at least one flaw to my logic: Jesus could just walk to shore if necessary.

Knowing that Jesus heeds his own advice and spends time away from the crowd does wonders for my own devotional life and sense of spiritual well-being. There were still people coming to see Jesus after he went away to pray, but he left them in order to return renewed to his life among the people, healing

I cherish the fact that Jesus went away to pray and came back renewed.

and teaching and showing compassion to those who came to him.

I have since chaperoned groups attending teen gatherings like the one I loved so much. Even as an adult I experience such events as life-giving and faith-enriching—but now they are also incredibly exhausting. When I deliver the youth back to their waiting parents, I provide a brief statement that could be considered a warning label: "They had a great time and have lots of stories to share. And they're very, very tired."

And then I go home to sleep.

The author is Jennifer Moland-Kovash, who is copastor of All Saints Lutheran Church in Palatine, Illinois.

Can the Jordan roll again?

River revival

by Michael Schwartz

A STROLL ALONG THE Alumot Dam on the Jordan River is on no one's list of holy sites in the Holy Land. Yet the interface between the holy and the profane happens here all day every day. The experience is available for every visitor without ritual and with no need for spiritual discipline beyond the ability to use visual or olfactory perceptions. The Alumot Dam has no entrance fee, but your soul may pay a price for the visit.

The dam is located less than two miles from the southern end of the Sea of Galilee, from where the Jordan River, the world's lowest river, flows out and heads toward the Dead Sea. Between the Sea of Galilee and the dam, the Jordan can be seen from a heavily trafficked highway bridge as a refreshing wave of blue-green rolling water. On a hot day, which most days are in this region, the view generates a strong compulsion to quench your thirst, both physical and spiritual, with a long, cool drink from the river.

For many visitors, this view is an inspirational glimpse of the "mighty Jordan," the river considered holy by Christians, Muslims and Jews—half of all humanity. I am surely not the only one whose heart spontaneously sings a medley of Jordan River songs every time I glimpse the river here: "The Jordan River is deep and wide, hallelujah / Meet my mother on the other side . . . The Jordan River is chilly and cold . . . / Chills the body, but not the soul, hallelujah." Or maybe: "Roll River Jordan roll / Meet me at the bank of the beautiful river / There will be trial and tribulation along the way / And I'm makin' way for a better day."

Just beyond the bridge's overlook is the Yardenit Visitors Center where each year over 600,000 Christian pilgrims hold prayer services and baptismal ceremonies, plunging into the Jordan from conveniently placed stairs. Activities of a more secular nature happen a few hundred meters further downstream, where kayaks are rented for paddling on the remaining flow of the Jordan, which is dredged and maintained for recreational use until it dead-ends at Alumot Dam.

The dam itself looks unremarkable. It consists of a few meters of dirt road along some still water. A large overflow pipe, emblazoned with a reassuring hiking-trail marker, sticks out over the water and disappears under the dirt berm of the dam. The eye looks across the dam to the shady undergrowth on the other side: the Jordan River must be down there. But when you look down, no water is visible. Yet you hear the sound of rushing water.

Then you begin to notice a smell drifting up from that side of the dam. There! Partly concealed by rocks and behind a huge eucalyptus tree, water shoots from a pipe and pours over the rocks along the embankment.

A nearby sign and another whiff of the breeze explain what is happening: a mix of raw and partially treated sewage, combined with diverted saline spring water, is being emptied into the Jordan riverbed. Further on, agricultural runoff joins the formula, together with more waste water. This is today's lower Jordan River.

Because Jordan, Syria and Israel remove nearly all the fresh water from the river and its source streams, the lower Jordan has been reduced to a mere 2 percent of its natural flow—and that trickle is heavily polluted with wastewater from all three countries. The river barely reaches the Dead Sea. Because of this

The Jordan today is a shallow sewage canal, its shore a stinking sludge pile.

massive environmental ravaging of the river, over 50 percent of the biodiversity of the river valley has already been lost.

Standing on Alumot Dam, one seems frozen in a moment in time, standing between the glorious River Jordan of the past and the sewage canal that the river has become. The history and holiness of this river inspired evolution and revolution in human society over the past 3,000 years. Crossing or immersing in the Jordan, whether literally or figuratively, is heavily symbolic. That the river marks the divide between exile and home is as relevant for both Israelis and Palestinians today as it was in biblical times. For a contemporary American example, it is difficult to imagine the American civil rights movement without the vision, hope and courage evoked by the songs about the Jordan River sung by activists in marches and church gatherings. The Jordan River's symbolic legacy provided inspiration that helped catalyze a societal revolu-

Rabbi Michael Schwartz works for Friends of the Earth Middle East, a regional environmental group with offices in Tel-Aviv, Bethlehem and Amman.

tion, correcting grave injustices and changing the understanding of what America is.

But the Jordan today is too shallow and narrow for Michael to row a boat across, and the shore is a stinking pile of organic sludge. The water may or may not chill the body, but it will certainly give you a skin rash, if not full-blown dysentery. You can't cross to the other side because stray land mines swept up by the river from old minefields make it too dangerous. And mother isn't waiting on the other side—army patrols have declared it a closed military area and block access. In contrast to its glorious past, the sight and smell of the sewage downstream appears as a prophecy of where contemporary society is headed.

What possibly redemptive message is there to discover in today's Jordan River from which future generations might gain inspiration? While there is always an expectation that heaven and earth meet in the Holy Land, when you look at today's Jordan River, you mainly see a reflection of human greed and shortsightedness.

Nevertheless, something redemptive is happening in the lower Jordan River. Though significant "trial and tribulation along the way" remains, community activists and environmental professionals are showing that citizens of the region can still "make way for a better day" on the Jordan.

The movement is being led by Friends of the Earth Middle East, for which I work. It is the only joint Palestinian-Israeli-Jordanian nongovernmental organization in existence. The work of this NGO shows that in the Middle East—where the problems are big but the land is small, where "my pollution" is "your pollution" and vice versa, and where water is scarce and flows under and over and along the borders—progress requires cooperation. It also shows that cooperation can happen.

FoEME's approach is both sensible and obvious. Its experience has been that when it comes to the environment, local self-interest can overcome national antagonisms. As a

Something redemptive is happening in the lower Jordan.

result, work on environmental issues can be a fulcrum for peacemaking.

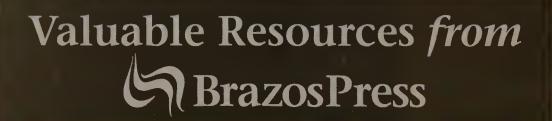
Ten years ago, FoEME launched the Good Water Neighbors program, which identified pairs of Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian cross-border communities that shared water resources. FoEME encouraged local residents to set up shared water awareness and conservation projects. Most notably, youth "water trustees" in each community were trained to take responsibility for their local water resources and later were introduced to their peers across the border. By comparing maps of local environmental hazards that the youths themselves created through months of work, they quickly realized the impact they had on each other's lives and their shared dependency on adequate and clean water resources.

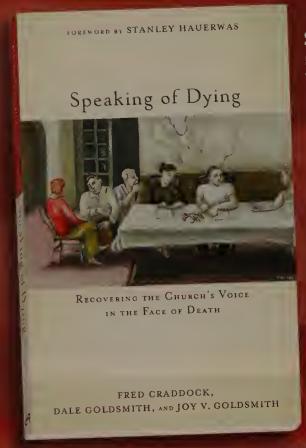


In their home communities, the youths and others appealed to local government leaders to work for water improvements. Over the years, five pairs of mayors signed Memoranda of Understanding in which they pledged to work across the borders to resolve shared environmental problems. Over the past three years, FoEME has helped leverage over \$200 million of investment from international agencies for the now 28 GWN communities, helping them implement the memoranda agreements and improve the water resource infrastructure.

Which brings us back to the Jordan River. Standing on the Alumot Dam's dirt road, one can see something besides pollution. Less than a minute's walk from where the sewage pipe spills out into the riverbed, heavy machinery is building a wastewater treatment plant for Israel's Jordan River Regional Council, one of FoEME's strongest GWN communities. Further downstream, in the city of Beit She'an, another GWN community, a new waste treatment plant is already operating. Across the border in Jordan, the GWN community North Shuna has a similar plant under construction. Further south, in GWN Jericho, plans and funding are in place for another treatment facility. When all these plants are online in a few years, almost no municipal sewage will enter the Jordan.

Like an apothecary treating a seriously ill patient, environmental activists in the region need a wide array of formulas and medicines. Besides encouraging bottom-up community organizing and connecting community projects with foreign development agencies, they've had to address national authorities as well. After FoEME's persistent urging, the Israeli environment minister pledged to return fresh water to the Jordan for the first time in over 60 years. Although only 30 million





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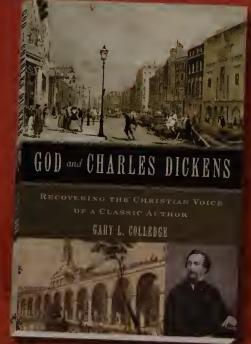
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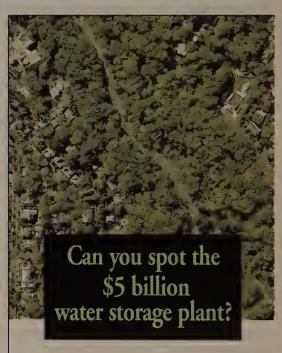
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cubic meters of water per year has been pledged—less than 10 percent of what is needed to make the Jordan's rehabilitation viable—it will be enough to ensure that the Jordan doesn't run dry in hot months.

Thich raises the stickiest set of problems: What happens to the water downstream? A few miles south of the Sea of Galilee, the Jordan becomes the international border between Israel and Jordan, and then it flows past the 1967 Green Line into the Palestinian West Bank. Water is the thirsty Middle East's most valuable resource, and climate change and population growth are already making water demand even greater and thus potentially more contentious. Will continued inequality, mutual suspicion and competition over water ensure resource sustainability and mitigate tensions, or would cooperation and striving toward water justice make the more effective program?



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THE POLLUTED JORDAN: As a result of the diversion of water and the inflow of pollution, the Jordan ceases to exist as a natural river about two kilometers south of the Sea of Galilee.

Again, FoEME's appeal to collective self-interest models a way to manage the water more efficiently and share it more equitably. Contested water causes costly conflict, while shared water creates a disincentive for all sides to tolerate pollution or waste from anyone. Water justice for all of the region's residents is more than an ideal—it outlines the long-term strategy for providing sufficient water for anyone: by providing it to everyone.

The river of justice, the river of peace, may yet flow again.

Thus, FoEME is working to create a first ever regional master plan for the lower Jordan River. FoEME's master plan will bring together a master plan already being developed by the Israeli government for the Israeli portion together with new master plans to be developed for the Jordanian and Palestinian sections. To gain grassroots support, FoEME is organizing stakeholders to voice their interests and needs through a Jordan River Council, which includes local business and community leaders from each country alongside religious leaders who consider the Jordan River holy and want to see it healthy again. Local and national water officials and leading experts participate in discussions,

commenting on FoEME's studies as they progress, despite their concerns that they will have to give up some fresh water to rehabilitate the river. FoEME's regional meetings provide a rare opportunity for Jordanians, Palestinians and Israelis to sit around the table together to discuss rehabilitation efforts.

Other pieces of the puzzle are also being put into place. As the Dead Sea continues to shrink, largely due to lack of water from the emaciated Jordan River, FoEME and other groups are organizing supporters of the Dead Sea to help the Jordan River as well. FoEME operates the Sherhabil Bin Hassneh EcoPark in Jordan and the Palestinian Auja Village EcoPark, which, with their guesthouse facilities and community tourism focus, help promote ecotourism as a viable economic alternative to water-intensive farming practices in the Jordan Valley. Ecotourism income gives partners an economic interest in making the Jordan an inviting—and profitable—piece of the natural world once again.

FoEME has plans under way to create the transboundary Jordan River Peace Park at the confluence of the Jordan and Yarmouk rivers. The aim is for this to be a shared space, bridging the border and modeling the benefits of river cooperation on the Island of Peace which lies between Israel and Jordan. With the force of the mighty old Jordan in mind, hope is renewed and vision sparks. The river of justice, the river of peace, may flow yet again.

David Hollinger on what the mainline achieved

Culture changers

by Amy Frykholm

IN HIS PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS to the

2011 meeting of the Organization of American Historians, David Hollinger focused on the contributions and successes of ecumenical Protestants in their mid-20th-century encounter with diversity. Hollinger, professor of history at the University of California at Berkeley, specializes in American intellectual history. His survey The American Intellectual Tradition is a widely used textbook. Among his other books are Cosmopolitanism and Solidarity, Science, Jews, and Secular Culture and Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism.

In your account of mid-20th-century Protestantism, you use the term *ecumenical* Protestant instead of *mainline*, *mainstream* or *liberal*. Why do you make this choice?

I use *ecumenical* because it is much more specific historically and analytically than *mainstream* or *liberal*. *Mainstream* is a term that is too general and can cover almost anything. *Liberal*, too, is a term that you can apply to culture or politics as well as theology.

"Ecumenical leaders of the 1960s achieved much more than they are given credit for."

Ecumenical refers to a specific, vital and largely defining impulse within the groups I am describing. It also provides a more specific and appropriate contrast to evangelical. The term evangelical came into currency in the midcentury to refer to a combination of fundamentalists, Pentecostals, followers of holiness churches and others; ecumenical refers to the consolidation of the ecumenical point of view in the big conferences of 1942 and 1945.

We've become so accustomed to the narrative of "mainline decline" that it is difficult to get our minds around a more nuanced version of this story. How do you tell this story?

The ecumenical leaders achieved much more than they and their successors give them credit for. They led millions of American Protestants in directions demanded by the changing circumstances of the times and by their own theological tradition. These ecumenical leaders took a series of risks, asking their constituency to follow them in antiracist, anti-imperialist, feminist and multicultural directions that were understandably resisted by large segments of the white public, especially in the Protestant-intensive southern states.

It is true that the so-called mainstream lost numbers to churches that stood apart from or even opposed these initiatives, and ecumenical leaders simultaneously failed to persuade many of their own progeny that churches remained essential institutions in the advancement of these values.

But the fact remains that the public life of the United States moved farther in the directions advocated in 1960 by the CHRISTIAN CENTURY than in the directions then advocated by Christianity Today. It might be hyperbolic to say that ecumenists experienced a cultural victory and an organizational defeat, but there is something to that view. Ecumenists yielded much of the symbolic capital of Christianity to evangelicals, which is a significant loss. But ecumenists won much of the U.S. There are trade-offs.

We usually say, "The victors write history," but here you seem to be saying, "The victors refuse to claim victory." Why is that?

The victors are slow to claim victory because they too often assume that numbers of church members are what counts most. If they had a more capacious understanding of the ways in which religion can function in society, they might be able to feel more pride in what happened. The great Anglican archbishop William Temple used to say that any church aware of its deepest missions would be willing to cease to exist if it advanced its ultimate goals.

The press and many spokespersons for evangelicalism dominate the conversation about American religion by trumpeting the numerical flourishing of evangelical fellowships of many kinds, and ecumenical Protestants have often accepted the terms of the conversation set by the evangelicals and the predictably numbers-first press.

What role did ecumenical Protestants play in shaping contemporary culture that are perhaps too easily forgotten today?

Ecumenical Protestants were way ahead of the evangelicals in accepting a role for sex beyond procreation and in supporting an expanded role for women in society. The ecumenical Protestants understood full well that the Jim Crow system could not be overturned without the application of state

power, rejecting the standard line of Billy Graham and many other evangelicals that racism was an individual sin rather than a civil evil. The ecumenical Protestants developed a capacity for empathic identification with foreign peoples that led them to revise their foreign missionary project, diminishing its culturally imperialist aspects—and that led them, further, to the forefront of ethnoracially pluralist and egalitarian initiatives as carried out by white Americans. The ecumenical Protestants resoundingly renounced the idea that the United States is a Christian nation, while countless evangelical leaders continue to espouse this deeply parochial idea.

What were the not quite fatal flaws of ecumenical Protestantism in the 20th century?

This question is a bit difficult for me to address since I am not an ecumenical Protestant. Taking this question from the point of view of the mainstream churches, one could argue that they would be a lot better off today, and might have retained a more prominent role in American life, had they developed styles of ecumenism that had more respect for the role of denominational communions and local congregations in pro-

"Church leaders led their constituencies by taking risky positions."

viding a sense of belonging and intimacy. The sweepingly antidenominational pronouncements of ecumenical leader Eugene Carson Blake and Episcopal bishop James A. Pike, for example, and perhaps even the priorities of the Consultation on Church Union, could easily be seen as aloof from the lives of parishioners.

Blake and Pike, for example, advocated the elimination of all denominational distinctions. One reason was that they were so afraid of the Catholics. Catholic unity was something they wanted to counter with Protestant unity. But a lot of people in small congregations felt dismissed by these kinds of pronouncements.

Reading Union Theological Seminary's Henry Pitney Van Dusen today, you wonder how he could proceed while seeing so little of the world immediately around him. He got the globe better than he got the Methodists and the Presbyterians.

Do you see the line between ecumenical and evangelical Protestants dissolving or growing more distinct?

Do you know Fosdick's 1922 sermon "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" published in the CHRISTIAN CENTURY? I am advocating a kind of re-creation of a Fosdickian mentality.

The ongoing accommodation between ecumenical and evangelical Protestants may well continue, but if it does, I fear that it will be at the cost of an opposite accommodation that deserves more attention than it has received. Perhaps voices like that of the Christian Century and the intellectual lead-



THE LONG VIEW: Hollinger suggests mainline churches won a cultural victory while suffering an organizational defeat.

ers of the ecumenical seminaries and denominations should more aggressively criticize the religious ideas proclaimed by the most visible of the evangelicals in American life today.

To be sure, secular intellectuals and journalists comment on these ideas in the *New Yorker* and now and then on the op-ed pages of the *New York Times*, but believing Protestants have an authority with the faith-affirming public that the rest of us do not have.

A more vigorous attack on obscurantist versions of the faith, a more insistent discussion of the latest in biblical scholarship, a yet more widespread commentary on the tendency of many of today's evangelical leaders to focus on tiny segments of scripture—this might be a valuable service. And might it cement an accommodation not with the evangelicals, but with secular intellectuals? That might be a good thing. The salient solidarity today may not be with the community of faith but among those who accept Enlightenment-generated standards for cognitive plausibility.

After reading your work, I've taken to calling Barack Obama the leading ecumenical Protestant in the world today. Am I on to something there?

Barack Obama is a standard-issue ecumenical Protestant. His positions on church and state are a great example of that.

What's the future of conservative evangelicalism in light of the trajectory you chart?

The chances of the contemporary form of evangelical Protestantism surviving and flourishing for quite some time are maximized by the odd constitutional structure of American politics, which assigns considerable authority to the so-called red states. Much of the governing of the country and the electoral college depend on people outside urban centers. We don't have

one-person, one-vote; we have this enormous, weighted power in the hands of states. That is a structural consideration that can yield a continuing flourishing of conservative Protestantism.

Another consideration is the reluctance of liberal Protestants to vigorously criticize the leading ideas of evangelical Protestants. As long as this continues, there is a discursive vacuum which means the press will continue to treat these family values folks as the voice of American religion. Only if faith-affirming voices get into the conversation more vigorously is that likely to change. Secular voices do not have as much pull in that conversation.

You have called ecumenical Protestantism a halfway house, if not an actual slippery slope, to secularism. Are you saying American culture is fated to be post-Protestant?

I don't think the future is clear. I am not saying that everyone who comes out of the ecumenical tradition is doomed to be post-Protestant. I am saying that if that happens to a significant number of people, that doesn't seem like such a bad thing. You could argue that a lot of post-Protestants are closer to the ecumenical tradition than the highly visible evangelical Protestants in the United States.

What does it mean to be post-Protestant? If it means that you are advancing in culture and politics a series of values for which ecumenical Protestantism has been a historical vehicle—well, there are a lot more vehicles than there used to be. Ecumenical Protestantism can reconstitute itself as a prophetic minority rather than measuring itself in terms of how many Americans sign up.

I am speaking from a secular perspective that has a lot of respect for religious believers. I don't think that all religion is headed for history's dustbin. But it is not for me to say.

How did you get interested in this subject? How did it lead from your earlier work?

I have been frustrated by the gaps in our scholarship on American religion in the 20th century, which has seemed to me to be dominated by the history of fundamentalism and evangelicalism. While I was writing my book on multiculturalism, I became aware that many of the precursors of what came to be called multiculturalism, many of the early formulators, were ecumenical Protestants. So-called liberal Protestants had provided a facilitating function for the development of culture for many Americans.

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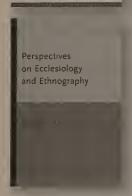
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by Stephanie Paulsell

The right note

IF YOU ARE LOOKING for a great book to share with a young person this summer, I recommend Francisco X. Stork's Marcelo in the Real World. Marked by a combination of page-turning storytelling and theological depth, it is full of romance, mystery and a risky quest: everything you might want in a great summer read. At the heart of the book stands the question: What claim does the suffering of strangers make on us? Or as the book's main character puts it, "How do we go about living when there is so much suffering?"

Marcelo Sandoval is a 17-year-old looking forward to his senior year in high school. Living with something akin to Asperger's syndrome, Marcelo has spent his life learning step by step how to do things that many people learn intuitively: how to read facial expressions, how to interpret sarcasm and slang, and how to imagine what another person might be feeling or thinking. He's good with animals, hears music playing in his head, feels most comfortable adhering to a predictable schedule and, like many on the autism spectrum, nurtures a "special interest." Marcelo's special interest is God.

Marcelo pursues his interest by praying, studying holy books, going to mass and meeting regularly with his spiritual mentor Rabbi Heschel (she's no relation to Abraham Heschel, though she does loan Marcelo *God in Search of Man*). He is cherished by his family, his teachers and mentors, and the terminally ill children his mother cares for in a hospital.

His father, however, worries that Marcelo is not being prepared for "the real world." The real world is competitive; it has rules by which success is measured. Marcelo's father makes a deal with him: if he will spend the summer working at his father's law firm and successfully follow the rules of the real world, he can choose where he will spend his senior year. If he doesn't, he will have to attend the local high school.

Marcelo is assigned to the mailroom under the supervision of Jasmine, a no-nonsense young woman and aspiring jazz musician. She's not happy about having the boss's son foisted upon her, but she trains Marcelo in the ways of the mailroom. Another partner's son, Wendell, asks Marcelo to work with him on a special project involving the firm's defense of a manufacturer accused of knowingly making unsafe windshields. Wendell calls Marcelo "Gump" and tries to enlist his help in seducing Jasmine.

Marcelo is trying to sort out his discomfort with Wendell's menacing attraction to Jasmine and his own confusing feelings for her when he comes across a photo of a young girl in a box labeled "trash." The girl's face was badly disfigured in a car

accident when the windshield she hit did not shatter into pieces as it should have.

Once Marcelo slides the photo out of the envelope, he cannot turn away. The girl's eyes look into his eyes, and he sees "a question directed at me."

This question plunges Marcelo into turmoil. He wonders if he is overreacting the way he has seen other autistic kids overreact to things others do not find nearly as troubling. Obviously, others at the law firm have seen this photo and have not been affected as Marcelo is affected. Obviously, his father has seen it and done nothing.

Marcelo is in new territory, for there is no schedule he can devise to solve this problem, no rule book that will tell him what he ought to do. But he knows he must fight for this girl. When he turns to Jasmine for help, she urges him to listen carefully, in every choice he makes, for what the next note should be. "But how do I know the next note is the right one?"

Faith is following the music when we don't hear it.

Marcelo asks her. "The right note sounds right and the wrong note sounds wrong," she tells him.

Rabbi Heschel also makes an argument for improvisation, reminding Marcelo that discerning God's will is a "messy business." "What else can we do," she asks this young man who is on fire with purpose, "but trust that He is at the source of what we feel and hope He is at the end of what we want to do?" That is faith, she tells him: "Following the music when we don't hear it."

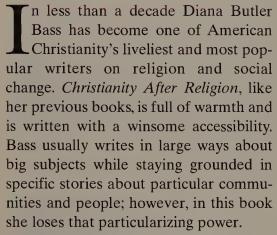
When a stranger looks out of a photo into Marcelo's eyes, he responds the way Jesus responded when a leper knelt before him and said, "If you choose, you can make me clean." He responds the way the Buddha did when he slipped through the gates of his father's palace to encounter the realities of illness, old age and death. He offers the best help he can give, and he searches for a way of living that allows him to respond to human suffering with his heart open. What he finds is the risky art of improvisation, grounded in prayer and friendship, life and love, justice and forgiveness. As heroic as Katniss in *The Hunger Games*, as romantic as Edward in *Twilight*, Marcelo is a young adult character to love and to follow.

Stephanie Paulsell teaches at Harvard Divinity School.

Review

Church as problem and solution

by Kyle Childress



Books about the Christian faith tend to fall along a spectrum. On one end of the spectrum, the church is the problem; on the other, the church is the solution. Many contemporary books cluster somewhere around the middle, but in the past few years they have been bunching up on the church-is-the-problem side. *Christianity after Religion* joins these.

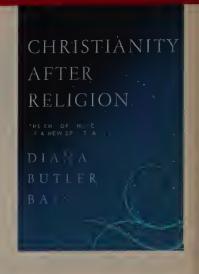
Bass's two previous books, A People's History of Christianity (2009) and the highly successful Christianity for the Rest of Us (2006), were on the solution side of the spectrum. In both she was clear that Christianity must change and is changing, just as she asserts in her new book, yet in those she told historical and contemporary stories of congregations and small communities of faith that have quietly and sometimes creatively practiced the love of Christ in the midst of such change. In Christianity after Religion she asks, "Despite such examples of vibrant faith, why is Christianity in the United States struggling to maintain its influence, institutions, and numerical strength?" She says up front that she does not believe that it is "wise to adapt religions to contemporary tastes willynilly," but the bulk of the book is an effort to "reform, renew, and reimagine

ancient traditions in ways that make sense to contemporary people."

The book is divided into three sections. The first, called "The End of Religion," leans heavily on polls and surveys showing that traditional Christianity and the conventional church are ending while a new yearning for spirituality is emerging. Sprinkled in with the number crunching and sociology are stories of people who have given up on standard Christianity for something more spiritual. As a pastor who is inundated with this kind of information every day, I began calling this the "tell me something I don't know" section. After more than a few anecdotes about people saying, "I used to go to church but now I'm spiritual," I kept thinking, "I can match every one of your stories with five more I've heard in the grocery store, in parking lots, at funeral homes and in civic clubs." If I had a nickel for each time someone told me they "used to be in church, but," I'd be rich.

Bass gets to the meat of her argument in the second part, "A New Vision," which I call the "worth the price of the book" section. Her argument is clustered around three basic questions that she says every religion seeks to answer: What do I believe? What am I to do? And who am I, and to whom do I belong? From her perspective, conventional Christianity has tended to frame these questions in terms of a desire to learn the right beliefs so people can act properly and get into the right group. Bass reframes them by reversing their order and saying that a renewed Christianity, rooted in the ancient faith, is about belonging to community, which leads to changes in behavior (practices), which leads to belief (which Bass redefines as trust).

This middle third of the book is help-



Christianity after Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening

By Diana Butler Bass HarperOne, 304 pp., \$25.99

ful and stimulating. I wrote notes in the margins and made connections to other ideas, books and authors. For example, in the chapter about belonging, Bass writes about moving "from proposition to preposition" as a way of talking about the Christian life as a journey. The locating word through helps us learn to ask "Who am I through God?" As the apostle Paul writes: "I can do all things through him who strengthens me." Bass says, "'Through' opens a new door to understanding who we are. We are not only in God, but we exist through God rather like the difference between standing in a doorway and walking through one." It's a movement preposition and reminds us that we're not static. She goes on to say that, along with other prepositions, through invites us to "consider identity by exploring how we move, to whom we are related, and where we are located."

None of this is all that original, nor does Bass work it in deeply theological ways. But from a preacher's perspective the writing is lively and imaginative, and it is conducive to communication from the pulpit.

The third and final section of the book, "Awakening," is most reminiscent of Bass's *A People's History of Christianity*, in which she cuts a wide swath, citing history as a way to talk about the present

Kyle Childress is pastor of Austin Heights Baptist Church in Nacogdoches, Texas. and the future of the church. For example, she uses the "New Lights" and "Old Lights" of the First Great Awakening to talk about the tension between the new awakening going on in Christianity and in other religions around the world and about the forces of reaction and fear also being felt. Bass sees the meanness in the world as a rearguard action, the death throes of dying religion in its various guises as a new global awakening of spirituality is coming.

Like any of us, Bass has her blind spots, and after several books they are beginning to show. She says little about the African-American church. Before I'd start talking very much about "Christianity after religion and the end of the church" I'd go to some black churches. The communities of faith descended from or inspired by the Radical Reformation-such as Mennonites and intentional Christian communities—also get short shrift. Because they have a long history of being light on their feet in the midst of social and cultural changes, I'd want to see if I could learn something from them as well. Both of these groups have a lot to tell the rest of us about the importance of faith that is deeply rooted in community and in institutions of faith that are sometimes small, flexible and adaptable.

Bass writes with the mainline Protestant church in mind—an institution heavy on programs, head-oriented religion and standardized ways of doing things. Her assertion is that this old church is dying, and her passion is for a new, vital, warm faith that practices what Jesus preached. But most mainline Protestant churches seem to be well aware of the need to change. They've heard of the same studies Bass has read and have had the same "I used to go to church but now I'm spiritual" conversations. The issue is not whether to change, but how to do so.

Most also know that the change we need will come not from more studies or plans but from being blown by the Spirit of God and learning from other Godblown churches. Bass, who on her travels is constantly watching and learning from such communities of faith, needs to tell us more, not fewer, of those stories so we can be part of the solution.

Unclean: Meditations on Purity, Hospitality, and Mortality

By Richard Beck Wipf and Stock, 212 pp., \$23.00 paperback

The man stumbled into the Sunday I morning service drunk. He was bleeding heavily from his hand and left bloody handprints on the door and then on the pew. Just as he arrived, we were gathering at the altar for the Eucharist. Before anyone had time to react, he was standing with us at the altar to receive the sacrament. The man was not a stranger to any of us. He had taken communion in this very spot before. He had delighted us with his wit and warmth. We knew him by name, and we knew he had a drinking problem, but it hadn't quite manifested itself in this way. As the priest distributed the Eucharist, he said loudly, "I have hepatitis C." At that moment, we had no time for abstract questions about the nature of the Christian sacrament, of eucharistic theology or of the significance of the "Body of Christ," but we did have a sudden need for answers. Should we commune with him or not? What would it mean to reject communion with him? What would it mean to walk away? What would it mean to send him away?

I remembered this scene vividly as I read Richard Beck's book Unclean: Meditations on Purity, Hospitality, and Mortality. Beck begins with Jesus' words to the Pharisees in Matthew 9, "Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice." Jesus gave this direction to those who were scandalized by his presence at the table with "many tax collectors and sinners." He assumed that the meaning of "I desire mercy, not sacrifice," a quotation from the prophet Hosea, was not self-evident. It would require time and attention on the part of the Pharisees to "go and learn" what it means. Beck aims to follow Jesus' direction and unravel this puzzle, using both contemporary psychological science and theological reasoning.

Reviewed by Amy Frykholm, CENTURY associate editor and author of See Me Naked: Stories of Sexual Exile in American Christianity (Beacon).

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Beck sees mercy and sacrifice as "two impulses pulling in opposite directions" and as "intrinsically incompatible." One reaches outside the boundaries of human societies to be inclusive and welcoming. Mercy is inherently hospitable. The other, sacrifice, withdraws for the sake of maintaining its boundaries. Sacrifices, in the ancient sense, are made to purify the individual or the community making them, and purity can never be a fundamentally welcoming impulse. The implications of this divide are present in every Christian church and at every eucharistic table. Who is included? Who is excluded? What are the limits of mercy? What are the failings of sacrifice?

Beck approaches these questions from a unique direction. He begins by describing a classic psychological experiment on the emotion of disgust. Spit into a cup. Imagine a small cupful of such spit. Would you drink it? For the vast majority of people tested in psychological experiments, the answer is no, even if the cup contains one's own spit. Once spit is removed from the mouth, it can't go

back in. It has become disgusting. Disgust, Beck says, is a deeply ingrained, but also learned, human response. Small babies put everything in their mouths without distinction. They might not like those things once they get there, but they have no cause to reject anything out of hand. Disgust is universal; all humans express it. But it is also cultural. Different cultures find different things inherently disgusting—too repugnant to put into the mouth. Beck calls disgust that has this biocultural dimension "core disgust." It focuses primarily on "oral incorporation."

Although this kind of disgust seems far removed from religious experience, Beck points out its associations with the Eucharist. The Eucharist asks us to incorporate something that might not be disgusting on the surface but that is associated with both body and blood—two things that are indeed disgusting to incorporate. In its most central ritual, Christianity is absorbed in the question of disgust and purity.

As symbolic and metaphorical crea-

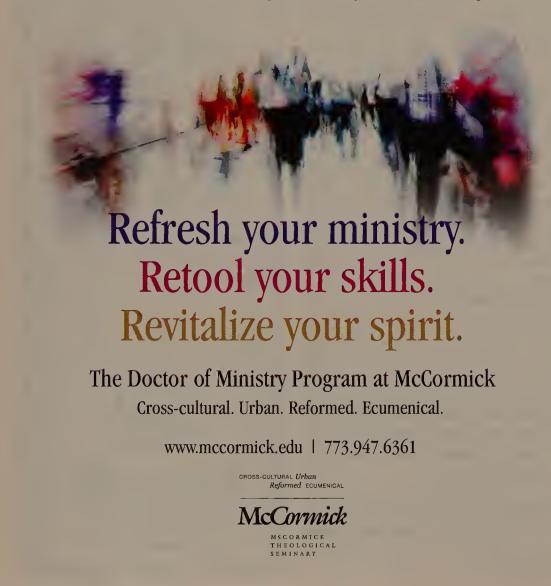
tures whose experience of the world is created to a large degree by language, humans extrapolate from the physical aspects of disgust to what Beck calls the sociomoral. Sociomoral disgust involves people whom we perceive to belong inside or outside of our circles.

Just like core disgust, sociomoral disgust has significant eucharistic associations. At the table, we are called to "welcome each other as Christ has welcomed us." Christ did not find our human impurity reason to dissociate from us. Instead, he took on the challenge of life in the human body and extended his reach outside the boundaries of his community (the Trinity), welcoming all, regardless of purity, into his fellowship. Thus, in the Eucharist, Christ continues to teach us what it means to welcome one another.

Lofty words. But as a lifetime member of the clergy, Beck knows that churches are often enclaves and cliques, and he is concerned about the importation of "contamination-based" reasoning into the life of the church. We do this importation unconsciously, and doing it is certainly very human, but it also works against the very nature of Christianity, which is founded on hospitality and the willing "contamination" of Jesus.

Beck considers contamination-based reasoning to be a kind of "theological sweet tooth." It is a natural impulse to like the way purity-based thinking feels. Such thinking is self-justifying and creates feelings of security and connection with others. Beck writes that the church will always be "swimming against the tide of disgust psychology, always tempted to withdraw, separate and quarantine." But we must fight against this tide through practices like the Eucharist that teach us physically and psychologically to desire mercy, not sacrifice—to overcome our tendency to reject and repel others.

Although Beck understands the modern psychological bent toward "healthy boundaries," toward creating what philosopher Charles Taylor calls the "buffered self," he doesn't set much store by it theologically. He is concerned that Christians might borrow this language too thoroughly and let this version of the self—always in need of more and better boundaries—distort ancient teaching



that the self must be surrendered in the work of love.

The final kind of disgust that Beck addresses is "animal-reminder" disgust. This kind of disgust arises when we encounter ideas, people or realities that remind us of our own deaths—that we are "dust and to dust we shall return." The scandal of the incarnation is the idea that the divine is linked to the animal. Humans are part animal and part spiritual beings, Beck reasons, and they can consider their condition from either perspective. Many of the things that we often call dirty are things that share this dual nature.

For example, sex is an animalistic activity that is sometimes experienced as a spiritual one. Citing psychological studies, Beck finds that people are most likely to call sex dirty when it reminds them of death, and it frequently does. This anxiety about sex and death is inherent in our speech and in our associations, in what we consider profane and what we call sacred.

Again, the Eucharist, Beck notes, is implicated in this kind of disgust. A key aspect of the Eucharist is the reminder that Jesus died. His body submitted to the fate of all bodies. The Eucharist reminds us of our vulnerability, our humility and our neediness. At the table, all share this vulnerability. All of us are the sinners with whom Jesus shares fellowship. What the Pharisees missed, Beck argues, was an understanding of their own need. They were unwilling to share basic animality with others. When they missed this, they also missed their capacity for love, which is an extension of need.

All three of these kinds of disgust and their implications—were at play the day the drunk, bleeding, diseased man descended on our church's Eucharist. In Beck's theological framework, there was no room for denying him the Eucharist or for withdrawing ourselves. To have done so would have been a "failure of love." But I am also well aware that our collective choice to do nothing, to proceed with the Eucharist as before, was not so much a choice of love as it was due to a lack of time. Perhaps, as Beck reasons, we had been trained in inclusion and acceptance every time we gathered at the table and heard the words of institution. Perhaps we were all just too stunned to move.

Beck is not, however, advocating a complete ban on purity-based thinking. In religious settings, such thinking has helped humans to access or imagine transcendence. The ritual life of the church—its version of sacrifice—is what makes the church the church. Beck singles out the Eucharist as a way to manage purity-based thinking. The Eucharist, Beck argues, "helps keep purity psychology harnessed to and in tension with the call to hospitality. . . . The Eucharist, properly practiced, regulates how the church experiences otherness and difference."

There's the rub, eh? What constitutes the "properly practiced" Eucharist is a matter of contention, and one that is outside the considerable set of concerns Beck has already taken on. I mentioned the bloody man at the Eucharist to a friend of mine who is a convert to Eastern Orthodoxy, and, of course, she was horrified. "How could you let a person in that condition take the sacrament?" After all, the Bible tells us that the sacrament is to be practiced in a sober spirit, with selfreflection at its heart. Obviously, the drunk man was in no place to be selfreflective. And yet I argued, and still argue in my head, "Was I in a position to refuse him? Was the love of God unavailable to him? Would depriving him of the Eucharist have indicated an unwillingness to acknowledge our mutual need?" I still don't quite know.

Unclean is nuanced, well argued and relevant to the ins and outs of any Christian community. But given Beck's reasoning and the two dirty feet on the book's front cover, I was puzzled that he didn't address another practice that Jesus bids his disciples to engage in: foot washing. Like the Eucharist, foot washing is an exercise in overcoming the impulse for disgust. It is so fundamentally boundary-crossing, intimate and frightening that the vast majority of churches—congregations that otherwise pride themselves on following Jesus closely-simply ignore Jesus' clear instructions to practice it. Is foot washing more radical than the Eucharist? Does it put our fears and boundaries too vividly on display?

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How to Read the Our'an: A New **Guide, with Select Translations**

By Carl W. Ernst University of North Carolina Press, 288 pp., \$30.00

In the decade since 9/11, it seems as Lthough every trade publisher and university press has brought forth a volume like this one: a guide to the Qur'an for the perplexed. Carl Ernst, a professor of religious studies at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, eschews the usual method for books of this sort. He contends that guides to the content, themes and teachings of the Qur'an prematurely iron out the tensions and conflicting statements in the text. Instead, he appeals to us as readers and teaches us how to make sense of the text, because in order to understand what the text says, we need to understand how it says it.

As he makes a case for his chronological, literary and intertextual approach, Ernst enumerates the sources of perplexity about the Qur'an concisely and persuasively, including archaic translations in King James English; selective proof-texting by politically motivated, unsympathetic polemicists; unwarranted expectations that a sacred text should take narrative form; and speculative conspiracy-theory explanations of the Our'an's composition.

Ernst's alternative mode of reading hangs on three key strategies. The first: don't begin at the beginning! Read the text chronologically, he advises, and he includes a chart that lays out both the traditional Egyptian ordering and the 19th-century text-critical ordering by

German Orientalist Theodor Nöldeke. The lyric qualities of the shorter early suras, or chapters, received Muhammad at the beginning of his career in Mecca and before his flight to Medina are the general reader's best entry into the Qur'an. The length and complexity of the suras increased through the 22-year career of Muhammad. In the Qur'an, the suras are generally arranged from longer to shorter, and thus in roughly reverse chronological

A chronologically ordered reading makes visible the characteristic styles, themes and concerns of the Meccan and the Medinan periods. The earliest suras were used as worship texts for the followers gathering around Muhammad in the early period of his career. Careful observation of the style and flow of the text reveals later insertions into these suras, sometimes to explain unfamiliar terms or spell out exceptions to general commands. Ernst takes the literary unity of the suras as a starting point and generally accepts the traditional view that the Our'anic texts date to the lifetime of the prophet. Readers familiar with historical-critical approaches in biblical studies will appreciate Ernst's careful, contextual and analytical reading. More investigation of questions surrounding the compilation and organization of the Qur'an would have been helpful, given the insight that such inquiry could offer into the development of the nascent Islamic community.

Ernst's second key strategy for making sense of the Qur'an involves attending to a particular organizational structuring of the suras known as ring compositions: a chiastic ordering of the text that mirrors

the themes of the sura from the center (such as A B C/X/C' B' A'), in which a central element (X) often speaks to a universalizable principle that is the focal teaching of the sura, or of a section thereof. These general principles can be distinguished from the more context-specific commands and statements, which are of limited application.

The structure in the later, longer Medinan suras becomes quite complex, with subsections having rings within rings, for example. Ernst takes pains to demonstrate this structure, summarizing the recent work of other scholars. Many readers will find themselves skipping or skimming Ernst's detailed analyses of the Medinan suras. Inductive identification of their themes and emphases appears at points more an art than a science. But the artistry and oral character of the Our'an is one of the bold lessons that one draws from reading Ernst's exposition: in order to appreciate the early and enduring power of the Qur'an, one has to become attentive to the oral and aural character of its structure. Such sensitivity is foreign to Western conventions of literature and narrative development.

A third focus of Ernst's investigation is the intertextuality of the Qur'an as prophetic literature—that is, the ways in which it refers back to and appropriates for its own purposes Jewish and Christian scriptures. For Christians and Jews, this is a fascinating discussion. "Reinterpretation and reframing of previous revelations" is the characteristic stamp of prophecy, Ernst tells us. "Prophecy always looks back toward earlier manifestations of prophecy," he writes, "by making a rhetorical claim to be the true meaning of earlier proclamations. . . . New interpretations of texts from a previous age ... keeps them relevant to changing situations."

takes into account the controversial and complex interrelationship among Jewish, Christian and Islamic scriptures. He

Ernst's approach to intertextuality

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Reviewed by Steve Young, instructor of philosophy at McHenry County College in Crystal Lake, Illinois, who formerly served on the board of directors of the North Jersey Christian-Muslim Project.

argues that apologetic approaches by each community to demonstrate the authenticity of its own scripture and the inferiority of the scripture of the other communities have come at the cost of seeing the complex ways that scriptures live and change over time. Intertextuality becomes especially prominent in the Medinan suras, which were composed as Muhammad's relationship with Jewish and Christian constituencies in his community became more contested.

As with his earlier book, Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World, much of the value in this book rests in Ernst's religious studies approach to his topic. The book clearly grows out of his experience teaching the Qur'an to university students, and it offers appendices especially useful in college settings: one contains a succinct structural analysis of each Meccan sura; another, an interesting set of exercises for analyzing Qur'anic texts. Ernst presents the current state of scholarly work in progress. Readers commit-

ted to reading the Bible using historicalcritical tools will be excited by the prospect of applying those methodologies to the Qur'an.

Ernst's focus on ring composition will need to be supplemented by attention to other kinds of literary and poetic play and structuring in the text. And there are important questions that Ernst does not address. For example, do the structures of the longer suras provide clues to the "occasions of revelation" during the lifetime of Muhammad or to the process of their compilation or composition after his death? Such investigation is important for making sense of both the formation and the standardization of the text, and the formation and construction of authority within what would become the early Muslim community.

Ernst notes the injustices done by some Orientalist scholarship of the past. But his work also makes the case that humanistic scholarship can make contributions distinctive from yet not necessarily antithetical to faith-based presenta-

tions of the Qur'an. Fairness requires that we not misrepresent the Qur'an, and Ernst's scholarship makes room for a respectful appreciation of the religious commitments of many who approach it. Such a judicious approach models a way forward for Christians, Jews, Muslims and people who profess none of these faiths to read the Qur'an and talk with one another about what they read.

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Fil⁰M

I Wish Written and directed by Hirokazu Koreeda Starring Koki Maeda, Ohshirô Maeda, Nene Ohtsuka and Jôe Odagiri

In cinema, children generally represent wisdom. Their innocence suggests a mind and spirit that has not yet been polluted by anger, disappointment, jealousy, greed, bitterness or any of the other flaws and foibles that accumulate as we turn the corner from adolescence to adulthood. This kids-know-best theme also flourishes in literature, going back at least as far as when Dickens examined the cruelty of 19th-century England through the eyes of David Copperfield and Oliver Twist.

The genre's latest cinematic entries are a pair of very different films from different corners of the globe. The more thoughtful of the two, and the one receiving less exposure, is the Japanese film *I Wish*, written and directed by the great Hirokazu Koreeda, who has earned a reputation as a master at working with children since *Nobody Knows* (2004).

I Wish concerns a broken family and one young son's attempts to heal the damage. Twelve-year-old Koichi is living with his mother, an unhappy checkout clerk, in a town where a simmering volcano looms. His younger brother Ryunosuke lives many miles away in a larger city with their father, a struggling musician with rock-star dreams. (The two brothers are played by real-life brothers Koki and Ohshirô Maeda.)

Once the ever-hopeful Koichi buys into a tall tale—that if he stands at a certain spot at a certain time and makes a wish as a pair of bullet trains pass each other, the wish will come true—his mission is set. He and his impressionable younger brother plot a secret rendezvous at the magical crossroads so they can become a real family again.

A journey film ensues, but to up the emotional ante, Koreeda throws in half a dozen other children, friends of the



BROTHERS: Ryunosuke (Ohshirô Maeda, left) and Koichi (Koki Maeda, right) are separated by divorce and on a journey to realize a wish at a magical crossroad.

brothers with hopes and dreams of their own: a would-be actor, painter, baseball player. One boy is willing to forego any dreams of future fame or success if his pet dog will come back to life.

If this sounds corny or overly sentimental, you haven't been exposed to Koreeda's cinematic skills. The children are spontaneous and totally believable, exhibiting the boundless energy that most adults can only dream about.

Subplots involve a grandfather who wants to open a candy store, a mother whose failed dreams are leaking onto her sad daughter, and—in an awe-inspiring tribute to the legendary Japanese director Ozu—an aging couple who let the children stay overnight at their house during their long journey.

The film's ending is poignant and truthful. Some wishes will eventually come true; some won't. Magic has nothing to do with it. Continuing the journey does.

Moonrise Kingdom
Directed by Wes Anderson
Starring Bill Murray, Frances McDormand,
Bruce Willis and Edward Norton

A different take on the wisdom of children is contained in the latest offering by cult director Wes Anderson. This quirky film, which takes place in 1965, revolves around a pair of 12-year-old loners who fall in love backstage during a Sunday school production of Benjamin Britten's opera *Noah's Flood*. Sam is an orphan living with uninterested foster

parents; his only interest in life seems to be acquiring survival skills as a "khaki scout." Suzy is a burgeoning writer of fantasy literature who must endure a trio of annoying younger brothers and a pair of battling parents—both lawyers, played with equal parts eccentricity and sadness by Bill Murray and Frances McDormand.

After a yearlong correspondence, Sam and Suzy plan an escape to a magical island. Once they're on the road (he with an overstuffed backpack, she with her cat and a suitcase full of books), a search party is organized—a posse of oddballs who soon come to terms with the lack of love in their own lives. They include a stoic sheriff (Bruce Willis), an obsessive-compulsive scout leader (Edward Norton) and an uptight social worker (Tilda Swinton).

As the search continues, Anderson, a master at deadpan humor, does a fine job of turning the cute story into something more profound. In the meantime, we are allowed a few more precious moments with Sam and Suzy, who lack Romeo and Juliet's passion but seem a lot more capable in the wild.

The film ends with a curious mix of funny and sad. I was reminded of Wendy's words to Peter Pan: she can't return to Neverland, because "I'm grown up now." Nothing, not even pirates or Indian princesses, can stop the long slog to maturity. But movies about the hopes of children allow us to take a breather before heading on down the road.

Reviewed by John Petrakis, who teaches screenwriting in Chicago.

GLOBAL CHURCH

The clash that wasn't

'm often struck by the chasm between the signifi-Lcance of a country and the attention it receives in Western media. One classic example is Indonesia, a country in every sense writ large. With 250 million people, it is by far the world's largest Muslim nation. In fact, it has about as many Muslims as all the Arab Middle East countries combined. Yet few indeed are the nonspecialist Americans who could tell you the slightest thing about the country.

Partly, this ignorance is a matter of history. With its Dutch heritage, the country (the old Dutch East Indies) never made as much impression on the English-speaking world as did, say, India. And in recent years, Indonesia has been blessed by a tranquillity that has kept it out of global headlines. Contrary to familiar generalizations about Islam, this huge Muslim country is a functioning democracy that rarely sees the kind of chaos that so regularly makes headlines in Pakistan or Nigeria. With a trillion dollar economy-larger than Australia'sit is also increasingly prosperous. Also, amazingly, its flourishing Christian minority is enjoying an era of rapid

Nobody can pretend that Indonesia is a monument to peace and tolerance. Historically, the country is no stranger to mass violence. Its war of independence in the 1940s was a savage racial conflict, and an anticommunist purge in 1965–66 claimed half a million lives. But both those

spasms were driven by secular nationalism rather than religion.

On occasion, certainly, Islamic causes have sparked violence, and the country has had its vicious terror groups and hardline Islamist militias. In some parts of the country, like the islands of Sulawesi and the Malukus, Christians have suffered terrible persecutions and forced conversions. Generally, though, Indonesia's powerful Muslim groups eschew extremism. The country is home to the world's two largest Islamic movements, the progressive Muhammadiyah and the conservative Nahdlatul Ulama, which between them command an astonishing 70 million members. Both preach tolerance and obedience to law. In the Christmas season, their volunteers defend churches from terrorist attacks.

All of which helps explain just how well Indonesian Christians generally are doing. Christians make up at least 10 percent of the population some 25 to 30 million people-giving Indonesia a substantially larger Christian community than the much better known Asian success story of South Korea. While some of these churches date their origins to missions in the Dutch colonial era, most of the recent growth involves very modern charismatic denominations of a kind that would not be out of place anywhere around the Pacific Rim.

Pentecostal movements

have grown spectacularly, buoyed by revivals and healing crusades from the 1960s onward and boosted by claims to charismatic gifts. They also benefited from the general withdrawal from political activism following the suppression of communism. The Pentecostal Church of Indonesia has grown from perhaps half a million members in 1980 to 3 or 4 million today.

The country's most visible Christian entrepreneur is Stephen Tong, founder of the Indonesian Reformed Evangelical Church, which despite its name has much in common with the Pentecostal worship style. In 2008, the church opened its Messiah Cathedral in Jakarta, a classic megachurch seating 6,000, a grandiose structure that would not look out of place in Seoul or Singapore. Other megachurches flourish in Jakarta and in Surabaya, the country's second city. Whatever may be happening elsewhere in the country, these urban Christians show no concern about hiding their activities out of fear of provoking persecution.

Despite the tolerance that has allowed the megachurches to boom, local authorities have been stingy in granting Christians the right to build new places of worship. In practice, this has caused many Christians to focus their activities on private house churches and in shopping malls, making mall churches a distinctively Indonesian contribution to Christian architecture. But even in the face of this bureaucratic obstacle race, churches persist.

It's an open question how long Indonesian Christians can enjoy their present prosperity, and there are some worrying signs. By far the most active Christian leaders tend to belong to the Chinese minority, whom majority Indonesians sometimes scapegoat as greedy exploiters. When the nation's economy stalls, as it did in the late 1990s, it is not difficult to mobilize attacks on Chinese (and thus on Christians, given that the faith has such a strong ethnic identification). If Indonesia suffered another economic downturn, we could easily expect a new wave of pogroms and anti-Christian violence. If that were to occur, the most likely perpetrators would be the militia group the Islamic Defenders Front, which already has an ugly track record. In theory, matters could deteriorate fast.

Yet Christians are doing far better than the normal stereotypes of interfaith tension would suggest. Somehow, newspapers never publish banner headlines announcing "World's Largest Muslim State Fails to Persecute Christians" or "Civilizations Not Clashing!"

Philip Jenkins recently wrote Laying Down the Sword: Why We Can't Ignore the Bible's Violent Verses,

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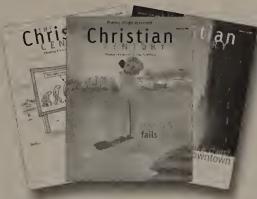
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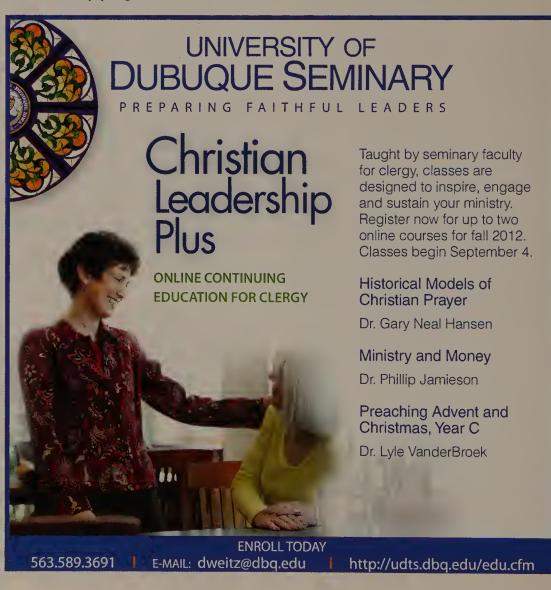
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Art





Images from The Gospel of John, Photographed, by David Kevin Weaver

In 2010, David Kevin Weaver traveled to Israel with camera in hand, seeking to trace the life and journey of Jesus. He also traveled with a specific goal: to create a photo essay narration of the Gospel of John using contemporary life on Israeli streets. *The Gospel of John, Photographed* (Four Line Media) collects 170 color and black-and-white works from the original 3,400 photographs. Weaver writes, "I had a very clear vision of the finished version of this book—the Gospel as a story, without the chapter and verse numbering as found in the Bible, and with modern photos interpreting key names, places and concepts of John's writing." It seems fitting that the word *photograph* comes from the Greek words for "light" and "to write."

-Lil Copan

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